

# VT-FUTRES



## **Vermont Fostering Understanding to Reach Educational Success – Final Report –**

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VT-FUTRES was a collaboration between the UVM's College of Education and Social Services, the Vermont Department of Education, the Justice for Children's Task Force of the Vermont Family Court, the Vermont Department of Children and Families, and children and families involved with DCF.



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## Executive Summary

**VT-FUTRES (*Fostering Understanding to Reach Educational Success*)** was a 2.5-year grant (October 2012 through March 2015) for infrastructure support to develop and implement effective multi-disciplinary policy and practice interventions for improving educational stability and outcomes of middle and high school youth in foster care. VT-FUTRES was a collaboration between the UVM's College of Education and Social Services, the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE), the Justice for Children's Task Force of the Vermont Family Court, the Vermont Department of Children and Families, and children and families involved with DCF.

**VT-FUTRES built upon Vermont's previous efforts to improve educational stability** such as the 2006 Casey Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) grant and the Vermont Justice for Task Force education sub-committee. The core of this grant was the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit for improving educational stability based on the evidence-informed intervention strategies developed by Joan Rock during the BSC process. This intervention was refined and tested during the course of this grant.

***Rock the GRADES*** was designed to be implemented by child welfare resource coordinators (RCs) and their local multi-disciplinary support networks to improve educational stability enabling them to:

- G** Generate networks in child welfare, educational, court systems and partnering agencies.
- R** Recruit & retain foster families in school districts with high rates of foster care placements.
- A** Access transportation to increase educational stability.
- D** Data collection and use across disciplines to identify needs and track progress.
- E** Educate local communities on importance of educational stability for youth in foster care.
- S** Screen youth in foster care for educational stability and well-being.

**VT-FUTRES had four broad goals:**

**Goal 1:** *Refine and implement the evidence-informed intervention and toolkit Rock the GRADES.*

**Goal 2:** *Build local multi-disciplinary capacity to improve educational stability and academic achievement for middle and high school youth in foster care.* Discrete trainings and outreach laid the foundation for sustainable workforce development infrastructure.

**Goal 3:** *Facilitate the cross-system collection and use of data on educational stability and outcomes of youth in foster care.* Collaboration with state leadership in child welfare, education, and courts to build infrastructure capacity for data collection and dissemination.

**Goal 4:** *Engage youth in sharing their experiences to positively influence infrastructure development around educational stability.* Our project worked with youth leaders empowered to review local and national work on educational stability and share their educational experiences through a research study and short documentary film.



## Summary of Process &amp; Outcome Evaluation Findings

Process Findings	Outcome Findings
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Rock the GRADES</i> toolkit was designed with local and national guidance, piloted in districts across Vermont, revised and finalized based on feedback.</li> <li>2. 206 trainings and outreach events were provided to social workers, educators, courts, caregivers, and other community partners in use of <i>Rock the GRADES</i>.</li> <li>3. Targeted outreach was provided to policy makers to integrate elements of <i>Rock the GRADES</i> in MOU between AOE and DCF, statewide trainings, data systems, and proposed bill on school stability.</li> <li>4. Short film was created to raise awareness and connect partners to toolkit.</li> <li>5. Trainers identified and trained to offer national <i>Endless Dreams</i> curriculum.</li> <li>6. First statewide data on school stability was collected and disseminated.</li> <li>7. Youth leaders came together to conduct two youth-led research studies, sharing their findings at a statewide conference, in testimony to Vermont legislature, and as research manuscripts.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Over the project period, modest increases in educational stability were observed statewide, with significant increases in some districts and no change in others.</li> <li>2. Findings also revealed youth experienced much greater school instability when living placements changed.</li> <li>3. Interviews with youth highlighted the importance of school stability on school outcomes and positive impact of teacher and peer relationships and engagement with school.</li> <li>4. Survey with district judges showed youth and family engagement increased with focus on school stability in hearings.</li> <li>5. Community and training surveys showed increases in awareness re: school stability as well as knowledge and skills for practices to improve stability.</li> <li>6. Successful policy changes included dissemination and integration of toolkit in state policies, website as hub for information, recommendations for data collection and reporting.</li> </ol>
Significant Barriers	Lessons Learned
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Existing DCF information technology infrastructure did not allow creation of an iPhone app for social workers.</li> <li>2. DCF data collection and management system did not permit easy access and analysis of school stability data.</li> <li>3. Engaging educators in some districts and partners at AOE was challenging due to understaffing and competing initiatives.</li> <li>4. AOE was not able to provide academic data on children in custody.</li> <li>5. The deaths of two children in custody led to a necessary prioritization of initiatives focused on safety and placement, and less on well-being projects like this one.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Relationships</b> are essential for achieving youth and systems outcomes. Our most significant improvements were achieved on the foundation of strong relationships, and the barriers we experienced came from weaker relationships.</li> <li>2. <b>Engagement</b> is similarly critical including student engagement with school and provider and policy maker engagement. We improved engagement by connecting our work to trauma initiatives and compelling dissemination (film, legislative testimony).</li> <li>3. <b>Stability</b> in school is important for student success and varies widely across Vermont. And our focus on system-level stability and sustainability was a significant benefit.</li> </ol>



## Introduction & Overview

### Overview of the community, population, problem being addressed and collaborative partners

Youth in foster care face many challenges to achieving success in their homes, schools, and communities. Child maltreatment, trauma, and social upheaval can severely shift developmental trajectories away from positive well-being, and frequent placement changes while in foster care can reduce hope even further (Pecora, Kessler, Williams, O'Brien, Downs, English, et al., 2005; Pecora, Williams, Kessler, Downs, O'Brien, Hiripi, 2003). Being in school provides opportunities to build protective factors to counter these challenges through forming social connections, building competencies, achieving academic success, and starting on a path toward successful transition to adulthood. However, these protective features may be weakened or lost altogether if youth experience school enrollment problems and educational instability as a result of being in foster care (Pecora, 2012).

To address this problem, our project developed and implemented evidence-informed multi-disciplinary policy and practice interventions for improving educational stability and outcomes of middle and high school youth in foster care. Vermont was well-positioned to take full advantage of this grant opportunity because: (a) Vermont's size and infrastructure could support (and sustain) feasible statewide implementation, (b) Vermont has a strong track record of interagency collaboration and set an ambitious agenda for helping youth in foster care achieve educational success, and (c) the remaining unmet needs for achieving educational stability in Vermont were aligned with the Children's Bureau priorities to increase collaboration and build infrastructure capacity to improve educational stability and academic outcomes for middle and high school aged foster youth.

Vermont has a long history of multi-disciplinary and statewide collaboration to enhance infrastructure, improve services, and increase access to services for children, youth, and families. In particular, Vermont targeted educational stability as a priority before the Fostering Connections and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (PL 110-351). In 2006, Vermont was one of nine public child welfare agencies across the U.S. (and only one of two statewide agencies) selected to participate in the *Improving Educational Continuity and School Stability Breakthrough Series Collaborative* (BSC). This grant yielded several important outcomes including (a) a memorandum of understanding between child welfare and education to meet the requirements of the Fostering Connections Act, (b) a multi-disciplinary state team charged by the judiciary to improve outcomes for youth in custody, and (c) the development and initial implementation of evidence-informed strategies for increasing educational stability in a pilot region that achieved promising outcomes.

### Overview of Program Model

The core of VT-FUTRES is *Rock the GRADES* a framework for improving educational stability based on strategies tested through the BSC process and piloted with great success by Joan Rock (the DCF Resource Coordinator from the pilot region) and her colleagues in one Vermont region



(see previous section). The *Rock the GRADES* conceptual framework consists of six areas that assist in achieving educational stability and academic achievement. *Rock the GRADES* is implemented by DCF Resource Coordinators (RCs) and their local multi-disciplinary support networks to improve educational stability enabling them to:

- G** Generate networks in child welfare, educational, court systems and partnering agencies.
- R** Recruit & retain foster families in school districts with high rates of foster care placements.
- A** Access transportation to increase educational stability.
- D** Data collection and use across disciplines to identify needs and track progress.
- E** Educate local communities on importance of educational stability for youth in foster care.
- S** Screen youth in foster care for educational stability and well-being.

While the BSC process yielded a few tools (e.g., directory of school personnel, spreadsheet for educational stability data entry) and practice guides (e.g., DCF policy, MOU between DCF and DOE, *Questions to Consider*), these resources were not easily accessible. In addition, some strategies (e.g., recruiting new foster homes in targeted school districts) had no corresponding written guides at all. In short, there was no packaged intervention that could be disseminated to other regions for statewide implementation.

To address this need, we formed a university and state partnership to secure funding through the Children’s Bureau *Child Welfare-Education System Collaboration to Increase Educational Stability*. Project staff were:

- Jesse C. Suter, PhD, Co-Principal Investigator and Evaluator, Center on Disability & Community Inclusion, University of Vermont
- Jessica Strolin-Goltzman, PhD, Co-Principal Investigator and Project Director, Department of Social Work, University of Vermont
- Joan Rock, Co-Implementation Coordinator & Resource Coordinator, Vermont Department for Children & Families
- Kristen Hayden-West, Co-Implementation Coordinator, University of Vermont
- Mary Kate Schroeter, Student Research Assistant

Our project staff, in collaboration with colleagues from the state’s Justice for Children Task Force focused efforts on succinctly capturing the successful practices from BSC into a coherent framework, and *Rock the GRADES* is the result. VT-FUTRES used this conceptual framework to build a coherent intervention or “toolkit” of strategies and resources, with an accompanying curriculum to train personnel on its use. Over the course of the project we created the first version of this toolkit and curriculum (based on input from state and national advisors), piloted it in several regions, revised it, implemented it statewide, and then finalized it and disseminated it statewide for sustainable use (see *Rock the GRADES* outline in Appendix B and <http://vtfutres.org/>).

Our project was guided by our overall mission statement, four goals, and 15 specific activities (aligned with project Logic Model, Appendix A):





*Project Mission.* Increase communication and collaboration between Vermont's child welfare, education, and judicial systems in order to improve educational stability and academic outcomes of middle and high school aged youth in foster care.

Goal 1: Refine and implement the evidence-informed intervention and toolkit *Rock the GRADES*. Through an iterative process of refinement, testing and revision, VT-FUTRES will create the *Rock the GRADES* intervention and toolkit.

1. Facilitate state and national input to inform design of *Rock the GRADES*.
2. Synthesize *Rock the GRADES* into a user-friendly toolkit available in paper and online.
3. Develop curriculum and provide trainings on *Rock the GRADES* toolkit.
4. Implement *Rock the GRADES* in pilot districts (Phase 1) and then statewide (Phase 2).
5. Finalize *Rock the GRADES* using data and feedback from Phase 1 and 2 districts

Goal 2. Build local multi-disciplinary capacity to improve educational stability and academic achievement for middle and high school youth in foster care. VT-FUTRES will offer discrete trainings and outreach during the two-year grant that will lay the foundation for sustainable workforce development infrastructure.

1. Roll out *Rock the GRADES* toolkit statewide through trainings, website, and iPhone app.
2. Deliver Casey Family Programs' *Endless Dreams* video and curriculum to raise awareness and promote strategies supporting educational success of youth in foster care and collaborate with Casey Family Programs for *Endless Dreams* train-the-trainers event.
3. Disseminate regular updates on educational stability and outcomes data to multi-disciplinary audiences through reports, newsletters, websites, meetings, and conferences.
4. Assist Vermont's Court Improvement Program initiative disseminating judicial bench cards supporting judges to ask about educational stability and outcomes for youth in foster care.

*Goal 3. Facilitate the cross-system collection and use of data on educational stability and outcomes of youth in foster care.* VT-FUTRES will leverage efforts from initiatives in child welfare, education, and courts to build infrastructure capacity for data collection and dissemination.

1. Create a simple data collection system for RCs to enter and manage data on educational stability and placement.
2. Collaborate with Vermont Agency of Education to analyze data and disseminate findings from their upcoming data warehouse initiative to track educational outcomes for youth in foster care.
3. Use VT-FUTRES data to inform evolving child welfare and education information management systems, monitoring, and reporting to ensure sustainability.

Goal 4. Engage youth in sharing their experiences to positively influence infrastructure development around educational stability

1. Partner with youth in Vermont who were in foster care to take leadership roles in improving educational stability and outcomes for middle and high school students.
2. Engage youth leadership teams in sharing their educational experiences through outlets such as video and social marketing outlets.





## Overview of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to assist the Children’s Bureau and VT-FUTRES with determining the extent to which the project achieved its stated goals and objectives and the extent to which the accomplishment of the objectives can be attributed to project activities. The evaluation was led by the Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PIs) Dr. Jesse C. Suter, a Research Assistant Professor at the Center on Disability and Community Inclusion (CDCI). Dr. Suter, Dr. Jessica Strolin-Goltzman, and Mary Kate Schroeter (student research assistant) made up the evaluation team.

We used a mixed-methods design that incorporate quantitative and qualitative data sources to assess program processes and outcomes. Sources of data included existing state datasets from DCF; educational stability data collected by RCs as part of VT-FUTRES (see VT-FUTRES Goal 3); and information collected directly from students, families, providers, and local and state administrators. We used strategies to build evaluation capacity across program and system levels to promote continuous feedback of data for ongoing decision-making.

The evaluation was guided by the program logic model (see Appendix A) and is comprised of two broad types of evaluation:

1. **Process evaluation** to document the extent to which the proposed inputs, activities, and outputs were conducted as intended; and
2. **Outcome evaluation** to assess VT-FUTRES effects on its proposed goals for development of *Rock the GRADES* toolkit, local multidisciplinary capacity to increase educational stability, systematic data collection, and youth engagement and leadership.

**The process evaluation** documented the implementation of program activities, assessed fidelity to each version of the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit, identified facilitators and barriers to implementation, and identified necessary changes in program components over the grant period. The process evaluation methodology followed the major VT-FUTRES activities depicted in the logic model (see next section: Project Implementation/ Process Evaluation)

**The outcome evaluation** answered questions about the effects of VT-FUTRES activities on outcomes for youth and system functioning. We organized the outcomes into anticipated short and long-term outcomes. It is important to recognize that we did not anticipate reaching the long-term outcomes during the relatively brief grant period. Therefore, the outcome evaluation focused on whether VT-FUTRES achieved the short-term outcomes predicted to lead to those long-term effects.

### *Youth Outcomes*

To evaluate outcomes for youth and families receiving *Rock the GRADES* strategies and supports we used two approaches – each employing strong measures of outcomes. The first approach was to analyze the educational stability data using a within sample, repeated measures design. Our plan was to begin by working with DCF Resource Coordinators (RCs) to gather data on identified short-term youth outcomes. They have first -and knowledge of many youth in foster care in their regions, and are in the best position to follow up to confirm outcomes for the youth



with whom they do not have direct knowledge. As such, this data source reflects a more direct measure of actual youth progress when compared to some clinical and functional measures whose connections to real-world change are less clear (e.g., higher or lower scores on a questionnaire; see Kazdin's [2006] commentary on arbitrary metrics). We also planned to work with RCs and other DCF personnel to identify or create ways to more systematically collect this data, so it could be accessed from the state data system directly.

The planned second approach for measuring youth short-term outcomes involved accessing questionnaire data being collected through existing initiatives in Vermont. Data sources included existing questionnaires from ongoing program evaluations in Vermont *DCF Family Services Worker Survey* (Child Welfare Training Partnership) and the *CSP Team Member Survey* (Interagency Agreement Support Team). In addition, since one of the short-term outcomes is increased youth engagement, we sought specific feedback on this outcome from youth leaders on SET and the STEPS facilitators and can share existing tools from the research literature (e.g., Cunningham and his colleagues [2009] developed one such tool for youth in residential treatment centers).

***During this project, we encountered a number of challenges accessing youth outcomes data.***

Sources of data for many of the youth short-term outcomes were based on existing data collection as part of case planning, and ongoing surveys. As we were given access to these sources of data, it became clear they were not collected systematically, either across the state or from provider to provider. This was an important finding, and our project shifted efforts to build capacity to reliably and systematically collect and examine school stability data, something that had not been accomplished previously. This yielded baseline data collection of these outcomes that can then be pursued post-grant award to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of educational stability efforts. The table below summarizes short-term youth outcomes from the logic models, indicators, and status for the current project evaluation.

**Table of VT-FUTRES Short-Term Outcomes, Indicators, and Availability**

<b>Short-Term Youth Outcomes</b>	<b>Indicator / Measure</b>	<b>Availability</b>
Fewer school changes resulting from placement change	Number of youth who changed schools divided by total middle and high school youth in foster care	Developed new system for entering & using this at case-level through manual review of placement and caseplan data.
Reduce number of school days missed during transition	Number of days absent from school following school change	Only available for 3 pilot districts
Reduce time for transfer of school records	Number of days before records received	Only available anecdotally
Increase in attendance	Average daily attendance	Not available
Increased # of CSPs for target population	Number of CSPs reported to RCs & Parent and other team members reporting number & purpose of CSPs	Only available for 3 pilot districts



Short-Term Youth Outcomes	Indicator / Measure	Availability
Increased education stability focus in CSPs	Parent and other team member reporting educational stability was part of the plan	<i>Vermont Court Improvement Program Survey</i> <i>Youth Engagement Survey</i> and <i>Youth Engagement Survey - Interview</i>
Improve youth & parent engagement in plans	Parent and youth ratings on engagement items	<i>Youth Engagement Survey</i> and <i>Youth Engagement Survey - Interview</i>

### ***System Functioning Outcomes***

To assess outcomes for the workforce development and training components on participants, we used a repeated measures design in which participants completed assessment measures of awareness about the protective effects of educational stability, knowledge of educational stability strategies and resources, and abilities to utilize effective educational stability strategies in their roles. Each of these areas were assessed using pretest / posttest training surveys.

Beyond building individual provider knowledge and skills, we specified two other systems functioning outcomes. First, we predicted that VT-FUTRES would yield improved perception of cross-disciplinary collaborations to improve educational success of foster youth. We conducted a survey of regional and state-level stakeholders from education, child welfare, courts, youth, foster parents, and any other related groups identified by SET prior to Phase 1 beginning and close to the end or after Phase 2 has completed. For this pretest / posttest design we adapted the *Community Supports Inventory for Wraparound* which was developed for assessing the capacity of communities to support interagency practices (Walker & Sanders, 2011), to create the *Community Readiness Survey*, tailored to the system implementation targets for VT-FUTRES. Second, we anticipated this infusion of work on educational stability would result in state policy recommendations and changes. To evaluate those, we reviewed notes of SET meeting minutes, legislative actions, and DCF and DOE policy briefs.

## **Project Implementation/ Process Evaluation**

We have organized this section by the four broad goals and specific activities of VT-FUTRES. The Goals and Activities are outlined below, then we describe the key outputs, facilitators, challenges, and lessons learned for each.

### **Goal 1: Refine and implement the evidence-informed intervention and toolkit *Rock the GRADES*.**

#### **Goal 1 Activities**

1. Facilitate state and national input to inform design of *Rock the GRADES*.
2. Synthesize *Rock the GRADES* into a user-friendly toolkit available in paper and online.
3. Develop curriculum and provide trainings on *Rock the GRADES* toolkit.



4. Implement *Rock the GRADES* in pilot districts (Phase 1) and statewide (Phase 2).
5. Finalize *Rock the GRADES* using data and feedback from Phase 1 and 2 districts

### **Goal 1 Activity 1: Facilitate state and national input to inform *Rock the GRADES***

#### ***State the Intervention/Activity***

The purpose of this activity was to convene groups of state and national partners to get their input on the development and refinement of the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit.

#### ***Outputs***

We formed the VT-FUTRES state executive team (SET) and a national advisory board to provide us with input to refine and evaluate *Rock the GRADES*. State advisory members includes co-principal investigators; representatives from the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF), Agency of Education (AOE), and Vermont judiciary, and other key stakeholders as necessary.

The national advisory panel included the following members:

<b>Panel Member</b>	<b>Organization/Position</b>	<b>Expertise</b>
<i>Cindi Horshaw</i>	Director of the Program Policy Unit in Pennsylvania's Office of Children, Youth and Families	Use and adaptation of education screening for all youth in foster care
<i>Debbie Staub</i>	Casey Family Programs – Washington State	<i>Endless Dreams Developer</i>
<i>Susan Reilly</i>	Casey Family Programs	<i>Vermont training support-Implementation of Endless Dreams</i>
<i>Mary McCarthy</i>	Director of National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (LASLN, collaborative networks, retention)	<i>PI of several CB grants</i>
<i>Charlie Auerbach</i>	Professor Yeshiva University	Data Analysis, evaluation
<i>Cathryn Potter</i>	Director Butler Institute for Children and Families (University of Denver)	<i>Evaluation, Collaborative teaming, PI of several CB grants</i>

The SET met monthly throughout the grant award and provided feedback on our work and critical connections to related initiatives in Vermont. Similarly, the national advisory panel provided targeted input at the beginning of the project, and then three more times over the course of the project. These meetings provided a synergy between ongoing state efforts and the development of *Rock the GRADES*, improving both.

#### **Specific outputs of these meetings included:**

- **MOU guidance** – The primary guidance document for educating schools and child welfare workers about the Fostering Connection Act was updated by the VT-FUTRES team. Practical steps, a flow chart on the decision-making process, and a Best Interest



Determination form were included. This MOU Guidance document is now under review and should be released in the next reporting period.

- **Resource Coordinator Training Manual** – The Rock the GRADES strategies have been included in the latest RC training manual to ensure sustainability of project strategies and resources.
- **Educational Well-being modules** - Have been developed and placed into the Foster, Kin and Adoptive Parent Foundations Training Curriculum
- **DCF School Information Data Entry** – Our review of existing DCF placement and school data has led to recommendations on how this data can be collected and entered consistently and accurately across the state.
- **DCF New School Fields** – Our project has received approval to add new school fields to DCF data collection to increase the state’s ability to track educational progress of youth in custody. Part of this will include a new quarterly report on educational stability.
- **Data sharing** - Our primary child welfare (DCF) contact agreed to allow us to share educational stability data during quarterly meetings with DCF personnel to raise awareness about this issue. In addition, Agency of Education (AOE) shared some initial outcomes for children in custody for the first time.
- **Endless Dreams Training** - Debbie Staub’s involvement on our advisory panel facilitated her joining us in Vermont for one of the train-the-trainer events in Vermont.

#### *Facilitators in implementing activity*

Many of our state partners were especially engaged in this project because VT-FUTRES represented a dedicated effort to raise awareness about challenges of school stability and offered an opportunity to work on concrete resource for providers. DCF central office was very supportive of this effort as was the Justice for Children’s Task Force and local courts. Finally, Vermont simultaneously had a state court improvement program grant that focused on educational success of youth in foster care. We shared resources and information, particularly data and work on bench cards.

#### *Challenges/Barriers regarding activity*

There were a number of challenges and barriers during this project that affected our ability to collaborate with state partners.

- **Child deaths** - In response to two deaths of children in custody, DCF strengthened focus and attention on safety as a priority, making discussions and infrastructure change on well-being more challenging. Several initiatives like ours had momentum slowed, especially as it came to institutionalizing some of the progress made.
- **Leadership Changes** - The Secretary of the Agency of Human Services (AHS) who oversees DCF, was removed from his position by the governor following the deaths of children in custody and challenges getting the statewide health care exchange website working. An interim AHS Secretary was hired. Second, the Commissioner of DCF stepped down to take a job in the private sector, and a new commissioner was hired from outside DCF. And third, the Director of Integrated Family Services (IFS) stepped down from her role leaving a leadership gap in state government for focusing on how interdisciplinary work can be improved.



- **Education Capacity** – Similarly our Agency of Education has been understaffed, and while initial educational outcome data were shared re: children in custody, they did not have the capacity to continue this work or regularly participate.
- **Joan Rock is amazing** - This project would not exist without the energy and institutional knowledge of Joan Rock. Because Joan is just one person, for whom VT-FUTRES is only 50% of her job, occasionally projects such as DCF the Rock the GRADES Toolkit development and district consultation have needed to wait for Joan's availability and then carefully scheduled.

### ***Lessons Learned about how to deal with challenges regarding activity***

The goals of this project required interdisciplinary collaboration at multiple levels. That was especially true given the relatively short timeframe of this grant award. In many ways the most profound outcomes, and biggest challenges, resulted from our team's ability to collaborate with leaders and stakeholders in Vermont. Prior to the award, we identified the leaders and initiatives that had guided this work before VT-FUTRES and future projects must also do that to build from what has already been developed and avoid duplicated efforts. In addition, it will be important to understand what efforts may exist, but not be active or have people dedicating significant time to them. Several aspects of data collection and implementation were slowed because we wanted to build from existing activities that were less active than anticipated.

### **Goal 1 Activity 2: Synthesize Rock the GRADES Toolkit**

#### ***State the Intervention/Activity***

As described above, the core of this grant is the *Rock the GRADES* model implementation and toolkit based on the evidence-informed strategies developed by Joan Rock a Vermont child welfare resource coordinator (RC) and a team of representatives from education, courts, mental health, and child welfare. The key elements of Rock the Grades are:

- G** Generate networks in child welfare, educational, court systems and partnering agencies.
- R** Recruit & retain foster families in school districts with high foster care placement rates.
- A** Access transportation to increase educational stability.
- D** Data collection and use across disciplines to identify needs and track progress.
- E** Educate local communities on importance of educational stability for youth in foster care.
- S** Screen youth in foster care for educational stability and well-being.

The focus of this activity is taking the strategies developed by Joan Rock, and synthesize them into an updated and user-friendly "toolkit."

#### ***Outputs***

We created the first version of the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit approximately 8 months into this project. This was done primarily through meetings with our SET, national advisory panel, and feedback from DCF staff in our pilot districts. The specific tools for version 1.0 were:





- G** Generate networks in child welfare, educational, court systems and partnering agencies.
  - District directory of school personnel for DCF workers
- R** Recruit & retain foster families in school districts with high foster care placement rates.
  - Press release templates for school, agency and community newspapers
  - Foster Parent Spotlight – weekly presentation to social work staff describing unique strengths of foster parents
- A** Access transportation to increase educational stability.
  - Travel Considerations - “How-to” brief for the toolkit has been developed to help resource coordinators work with families around transportation.
  - MOU guidance – VT FUTRES will be working with central office at DCF, and the State agency of education (AOE) to pilot the new guidelines for interpretation of the MOU around transportation costs for youth in foster care.
- D** Data collection and use across disciplines to identify needs and track progress.
  - VT-FUTRES created a simple spreadsheet to be housed in local districts to keep track of school placement changes
- E** Educate local communities on importance of educational stability for youth in foster care.  
Information sheets for DCF to describe:
  - What teachers and educators can do
  - Caregivers guide to Everybody’s a teacher
  - Law Center Case Studies for educational stability
  - PowerPoint and resources (Bench Bar, DCF, local interagency teams, Families, and Education)
- S** Screen youth in foster care for educational stability and well-being.
  - Two pilot districts committed to pilot an expanded education survey for their social workers to use during a placement change and on an ongoing basis to help assess educational success of kids in care.

### ***Facilitators in implementing activity***

All of the districts in phase 1 were engaged and committed to practice change in this area. There was an especially strong foundation in two of the districts that helped pave the way for piloting the education screening. As mentioned previously, we were incredibly fortunate to hire Joan Rock as one of our implementation coordinators, because she created the original and now has resources to expand state-wide.

### ***Challenges/Barriers regarding activity***

We ran into two challenges that made this activity somewhat more challenging: (a) It took longer than expected to hire our implementation coordinator (Kristen Hayden-West) and (b) obtaining buy-in and soliciting feedback took precedence over simply rolling out the original strategies developed through the BSC.

### ***Lessons Learned about how to deal with challenges regarding activity***

Because we invested time to have the right team members (Joan Rock obtained dedicated time on this project and Kristen Hayden-West was hired) and to get buy-in from all pilot districts, it took somewhat longer than expected to synthesize the first version. We believe this was a worthwhile investment, and an important strategy for future projects.





**Goal 1 Activity 3: Develop curriculum and provide trainings on *Rock the GRADES* toolkit.*****State the Intervention/Activity***

Rather than simply disseminate the toolkit, our team developed a training curriculum to introduce the toolkit to all DCF districts.

***Outputs***

Key outputs included:

- The curriculum and face-to-face trainings were implemented with all 7 of the VT pilot districts after the initial version of the toolkit was developed. By the end of the first year, all 12 DCF districts had received training.
- These trainings were interactive, and as districts had questions or offered examples for how to implement the toolkit more effectively, these were incorporated into the curriculum.
- VT-FUTRES team members met initially with district administrators and later with front-line social workers to get buy-in from leadership and tailor the training to the unique strengths and challenges for districts.
- DCF's *Resource Coordinator Training Manual* now incorporates all aspects of GRADES into the manual for new workers beginning the RC role. This ensures sustainability of this curriculum after the grant award.

***Facilitators in implementing activity***

All 12 districts were engaged and committed to practice change in this area. Work in the districts was met with a new-found energy and enthusiasm, and our partners were great at giving us feedback to improve future trainings. Importantly, DCF central office was very supportive of this effort as was the interdisciplinary Justice for Children's Task Force and local courts.

***Challenges/Barriers regarding activity***

Similar to other implementation challenges, taking time for buy-in and alignment with other priorities required additional time to create a curriculum that was effective.

***Lessons Learned about how to deal with challenges regarding activity***

The iterative nature of creating the curriculum (i.e., the training changed as the toolkit changed), openness to feedback, and ultimately embedding key aspects of the curriculum in orientation materials for the Resource Coordinator position were all important lessons promoting this activity's success. A toolkit without an accompanying curriculum would be much less useful, so this was an important activity to build into the implementation.

**Goal 1 Activity 4: Implement *Rock the GRADES* in pilot districts (Phase 1) and then statewide (Phase 2).*****State the Intervention/Activity***

After the first version was developed, the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit was implemented in half of the Vermont DCF districts (Phase 1), revised based on feedback, and then implemented statewide (Phase 2).



***Outputs***

- Within the first six months of the project we had engaged 7 of 12 local DCF districts. We originally targeted half of the districts (6), however one additional district joined Phase 1.
- By the end of the first year, we had received feedback from all Phase 1 districts and used it to create a second version of the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit.
- Within the first six months of the second year of the project, we successfully met with the remaining districts (Phase 2). By the end of the second year all districts were using the revised toolkit.

***Facilitators in implementing activity***

Phase 1 districts were especially engaged and excited about this project. That was expected as they volunteered to be first to engage in this project. Phase 2 is a good example of how our investment in buy-in and state-level engagement paid off. We had developed and maintained very good working relationships with local and state leaders, so getting participation and feedback for our iterative development process went fairly smoothly.

***Challenges/Barriers regarding activity***

Several of the Resource Coordinators were hired during the short period of this grant project. This meant it was challenging to get educational stability “on the radar” as they were being oriented to their new roles and faced with many other issues focused on child safety and permanency.

***Lessons Learned about how to deal with challenges regarding activity***

We have learned to gently nudge districts that were not fully engaging. Districts were challenged to find the time to receive the support that VT-FUTRES had to offer. This meant we needed a much more active role in connecting with them. Engaging the office leaders during each district contact was particularly critical to the support and success of the detailed work of the Resource Coordinators.

**Goal 1 Activity 5: Finalize *Rock the GRADES* using data and feedback from Phase 1 and 2*****State the Intervention/Activity***

This activity is simply the creation of the final version of the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit following the iterative development process described above.

***Outputs***

- The third version of the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit was completed by the end of the two-year grant project (and before the no-cost extension through March 2015).
- Compared to the original version with approximately 11 resources, the final version of the toolkit includes 75 unique resources including guidance documents, spreadsheets for tracking data, forms for data collection, letter templates, PowerPoint presentation slides for local trainings, press release examples, data reports, a brief documentary film, and state agency regulations and laws relevant for educational stability.



- An outline of the toolkit is available in the Appendix and the full toolkit is on our website: <http://vtfutres.org>

### ***Facilitators in implementing activity***

All of the facilitators mentioned so far under Goal 1 apply to this final activity. First, having the expertise of Joan Rock who provided the original leadership under the previous BSC project was critical for expanding the scope and reach of this toolkit. Second, buy-in and engagement from local and state partners was equally important for testing, feedback, and revision. Third, having a project with dedicated time was also needed to push this work to the next level. And fourth, alignment with other priorities (e.g., Vermont court improvement program, revision of guidance for the memorandum of understanding between Vermont child welfare and education) helped raise the awareness and priority of this work.

### ***Challenges/Barriers regarding activity***

Similarly, the challenges mentioned for the other goal 1 activities also apply. Leadership transitions, crises shifting priorities, challenges with buy-in from some partners and leaders are all challenges experienced during this project.

### ***Lessons Learned about how to deal with challenges regarding activity***

Investment in forming relationships, understanding what other projects and initiatives intersect with this work, and taking the time to develop something in stages rather than all at once were key lessons learned. In addition, with such an expansive toolkit, training and dissemination became increasingly important activities. Training was explored above and information about dissemination is shared under the next goal.

## **Goal 2: Build local multi-disciplinary capacity to improve educational stability and academic achievement for middle and high school youth in foster care.**

### **Goal 2 Activities:**

1. Roll out *Rock the GRADES* toolkit statewide through trainings, website, and iPhone app.
2. Deliver Casey Family Programs' *Endless Dreams* video and curriculum to raise awareness and promote strategies supporting educational success of youth in foster care and collaborate with Casey Family Programs for *Endless Dreams* train-the-trainers event.
3. Disseminate regular updates on educational stability and outcomes data to multi-disciplinary audiences through reports, newsletters, websites, meetings, and conferences.
4. Assist Vermont's Court Improvement Program disseminating judicial bench cards supporting judges to ask about educational stability and outcomes for youth in foster care.

### **Goal 2 Activity 1: Disseminate *Rock the GRADES*.**

#### ***State the Intervention/Activity***

Following the development of the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit, VT-FUTRES disseminated the toolkit and resources statewide through multiple outlets.



### Outputs

Dissemination of the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit involved a number of efforts that spanned the 2.5 years of this project including (a) trainings, (b) website, and (c) state policies. We also proposed creating an iPhone app, but were not able to complete this due to restrictions of the child welfare IT infrastructure.

#### A. Dissemination Outputs: Trainings

Face-to-face trainings were the primary outlets for introducing the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit to different groups in Vermont. Below we summarize the primary types of trainings, technical assistance meetings, audiences, and reach statewide.

Trainings & Technical Assistance	Audience	Districts # of 12	Trainings / Events	Participants
Orientation meetings with directors and resource coordinators.	DCF district offices	12	12	24
DCF training for all district staff	DCF district offices	12	12	206
Technical assistance for districts	DCF district offices	12	111	42
Trainings and meetings with state leadership	DCF central office	n/a	5	44
Educational well-being presentation focused on importance of school stability.	Interdisciplinary Local Interagency Teams	9	10	106
Met with DCF districts to plan and prioritize presentations in local schools.	DCF district offices	9	9	21
Presentations to schools and school districts.	Local school personnel	9	30	538
Two Statewide VT-FUTRES conferences	Interdisciplinary	Statewide	2	220
Vermont Foster and Adoptive Parents conference	Caregivers	Statewide	2	37
<i>Endless Dreams Training</i> (see Goal 2 Activity 2)	Potential trainers	Statewide	1	37
Vermont Bench Bar Presentations (see Goal 2 Activity 3)	Courts	12	12	199
<b>Total</b>			<b>206</b>	<b>1,474</b>

#### B. Dissemination Outputs: Website

One of our most prominent dissemination outputs was creation of the independent VT-FUTRES website: <http://vtfutres.org>. We reviewed several existing websites for similar projects, and chose a website developer who could help us create a website that was interactive and accessible.



Our website was released in the first 6 months of the grant, and we continued to add resources and components of Rock the Grades over the remaining two years. The primary audience for the online toolkit is still DCF staff, but there are also materials and links for caregivers, educators, and other child-support professionals. Our project developed video, *No Decision About Me, Without Me*, and the accompanying Discussion Guide are available through the site as well.

### **C. Dissemination Outputs: Policies & Procedures**

We worked closely with our partners at Vermont's Department for Children and Families (DCF) to embed relevant elements of the Rock the GRADES toolkit into training manuals, policy, and guidance documents.

***Audience specific components of Rock the GRADES were embedded into the following required trainings offered through the Child Welfare Training Partnership:***

- Foundations for Kinship, Foster and Adoptive Families, First Steps: Kinship Care
- Foundations for Kinship, Foster, and Adoptive Families, First Steps: Foster Care
- Foundations for Kinship, Foster, and Adoptive Families: Classroom and Resource Guide
- Fostering to Forever...A Lifelong Journey, Classroom and Resource Guide (required only for those in the process of adopting)
- Many toolkit materials were also included in the newly developed Resource Coordinator Manual.

Toolkit materials have been provided to the non-profit responsible for training Educational Surrogates for the state and they will be included in their list of online resources for volunteers. Initiative sustainability will be encouraged through an Educational Stability “check-in” at each monthly Resource Coordinators meeting to provide encouragement and answer worker questions.

***We helped update the Memorandum of Understanding Between DCF and AOE.*** The primary guidance document for educating schools and child welfare workers about the Fostering Connection Act was updated by the VT-FUTRES team. Practical steps, a flow chart on the decision-making process were included. The MOU is now seen as Vermont's go-to reference document on educational stability.

***We helped design and then disseminate the Best Interest Determination (BID) form.*** This form is shared as part of the MOU to create a series of questions for social workers and educators to answer to determine the best school placement for a child in custody. This form was added to the toolkit and in the State's new case plan process for youth in state care age 14 and older. If a youth's school plan has changed, use of the Best Interest Determination Questionnaire needs to be documented (see Appendix C). Completing the form whenever the child changes placement is not yet formal policy but it is “best practice” for social workers. An increasing number of DCF supervisors and school partners are requesting the BID be completed to inform decision making.

***Finally, the Vermont legislature was considering a new bill to promote school stability*** for all students who have changed school districts after the start of the school year. DCF reached out to our project team to provide guidance on the new bill and implications for youth in custody. We provided that guidance, however the bill did not move forward during the project period.



#### **D. Dissemination Outputs: iPhone App**

Originally, we proposed to develop an iPhone app for DCF social workers. The State of Vermont purchases iPhones for social workers to use as their work phones, so this appeared to be a natural opportunity to give them more direct access to information about their clients when out in the field. Both VT-FUTRES and the DCF Resource Coordinators were looking forward to testing the VT-FUTRES sponsored iPhone app built to allow RCs and child welfare caseworkers to complete the Best Interest Determination Form and make living placements from the field. Unfortunately, the outdated operating systems used on DCF computers are not compatible with the cloud-based data exchange necessary for the App to function. Our App technology partner, UnaMesa, attempted several creative technology work-arounds, but the systems would not function on DCF-based phones or computers. In September 2014, the decision was finally made not to continue testing the App in our pilot district or beyond.

As a lower-tech alternative, we distributed the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit and the film on approximately 300 flash drives distributed to DCF social workers, schools, DCF trainers, families and other social service partners.

#### ***Facilitators in implementing activity***

As with other activities, the support and commitment of DCF leadership at the district and state levels, and Resource Coordinators specifically was key for outreach and dissemination efforts. The trainings and follow up technical assistance were a key mechanism for sharing the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit, so having regular access to DCF district offices and staff was very important.

For the website, our goal was to keep the website available as a resource for the next 5 years. Initially, we thought we would have to shift the VT-FUTRES website to either the UVM or the State of Vermont servers at the end of the project. However our current for-profit web service provider, Burlington BYTES, offered to continue hosting the site for free through 2020. We have accepted this offer and are thrilled to know that the online toolkit will be readily available to sustain educational stability efforts.

Similar to other activities, the most important facilitator has been building and maintaining relationships with partners and groups that have been pursuing similar work and activities in Vermont. Our project staff worked diligently with the partners described above to make sure they could incorporate our information and resources into existing and new resources that will live beyond the VT-FUTRES grant. We established excellent support from the Vermont Justice for Children's Task Force, Educational Subcommittee, and they specifically asked for our guidance for drafting language. This relationship was critical for "getting in the door" on this activity.

#### ***Challenges / barriers***

One of our greatest challenges was engaging schools and educators with our project. The first *Rock the GRADES* goal is to help local child welfare offices build interdisciplinary teams to improve school stability. While we were able to reach some schools in the majority of DCF districts, we were not able to reach all 12. In addition, we did not have the time to conduct this presentation in the majority of schools and districts in Vermont. We knew this would be a





challenge at the start of this activity, so the goal of other activities during the no-cost extension was to make sure that DCF Resource Coordinators had the information and confidence to continue these outreach trainings into the future.

Another challenge was simply the ongoing development of these resources. They were not simply static documents that we wanted our information to be included. We overcame these barriers by working with each of our partners to identify how the resources were being developed and align our content with that work. Significant investment of time was needed to regularly update the website, training materials, and even recommendations for policy documents to align with the latest information.

Regarding the proposed Vermont bill on educational stability, we did not have control over the legislature decision to table this bill for now. However, we feel confident that our proposed language will be used if the bill is brought forward again for consideration.

And regarding the iPhone app, local schools and state computer systems are using different versions of web browsers creating accessibility issues. State computer systems have used older versions of Internet Explorer that were not compatible with some of the features available on the app, and even our website. Kristen worked closely with state partners and our website developer to identify the compatibility issues and address them. She was successful and the website is now accessible to all.

### ***Lessons learned***

As more schools are participating in trainings on trauma-informed schools we found increased interest in participating in our trainings as well. This will be an important lesson for DCF Resource Coordinators to apply as they conduct outreach in the future.

Perhaps the biggest lesson learned is simply to allow a great deal more time to any technology-related activities than anticipated. Even seemingly simple efforts (like creating a website to house information for end users) can become complicated if they need to work across systems. At the beginning of the app development process, assumptions were made about DCF iPhones and app compatibility. While UnaMesa has extensive experience working with non-profits, I don't believe that they, or VT-FUTRES, fully considered the age of the state's computer structure when starting the project. We have all learned important questions to be asked regarding the age and compatibility requirements of a partner's technology system. On the positive side, DCF staff were very willing to consider and test a mobile app to help with the BID and placement. They appreciate the role that new technology can play in their work.

Changing Vermont statute takes a great deal of patience, and then you need to be ready to move quickly if the legislature moves forward.





**Goal 2 Activity 2: Expand Vermont's capacity to use *Endless Dreams* curriculum.*****State the Intervention/Activity***

To further increase infrastructure capacity in stakeholders beyond child welfare, we partnered with Casey Family Programs to offer the *Endless Dreams* training series in Vermont. Based on feedback from the initial training, we used the curriculum to provide more in-depth training and outreach for educators in Vermont.

***Outputs***

- We collaborated with developer (and VT-FUTRES national advisory member) Debbie Staub to create the *Endless Dreams* Train-the-Trainer workshop for Vermont stakeholders.
- The *Endless Dreams* Train the Trainer curriculum was shared with 37 Vermont professionals at an all-day workshop on June 6, 2013.
- After reviewing comments from participants, the decision was made to shift from the *Endless Dreams* training to an event which embedded the educational needs of youth in foster care in a more in-depth trauma-informed training.
- In September 2014, we hosted two days of statewide VT-FUTRES workshops totaling 233 educators, social workers, caregivers, legal community, administrators, and others to share tools from VT-FUTRES and provide training on supporting youth who have experienced trauma. These all-day workshops combined VT-FUTRES materials on the educational needs of youth in foster care with an in-depth trauma-informed training with Youth Care Specialist, Charlie Applestein. The 12 DCF Districts invited local educators, caregivers and community partners in addition to key staff.
- Both days of the conference began with a viewing of our just completed video, "*No Decision About Me, Without Me: School Stories of Youth in Custody*". Two Vermont youth were able to join in the post-video discussion to share their own educational experience while in care. Sitting in regional teams, the participants were then introduced to the *Educational Best Interest Determination* form and guided through a sample BID activity to familiarize them with its use. Charlie Applestein followed, sharing concrete trauma-informed strategies for school stability and youth well-being. Finally, time was given for the brainstorming of regional plans.
- Following these statewide events, we collaborated with DCF districts to plan and prioritize school presentations held during the no-cost extension.

***Facilitators in implementing activity***

- Debbie Staub was available to us as part of our national advisory panel. As she is the developer of the *Endless Dreams* curriculum, we were fortunate to have forged a working relationship with her as it facilitated one of our main goals of educating school professionals on the importance of educational stability, continuity and success for youth in care.
- Feedback from participants was extremely helpful for better aligning future trainings with the needs of regional teams and led to the creation of the VT-FUTRES workshops.
- Charlie Applestein has devoted his entire adult career to helping children and youth struggling with emotional and behavioral challenges and those who guide them. An



engaging, informative, and practical speaker, several Vermont DCF districts specifically requested that Charlie be brought in as the speaker for this conference.

### ***Challenges / barriers***

- From the Endless Dreams training, some of the participants felt that they needed more than we were able to provide in the train the trainer. It was also challenging to get educators to attend.
- Our original plan was to offer these statewide trainings through the premier statewide summer conference on well-being for students, the BEST Summer Institute. Unfortunately for our project, we were not able because the agenda was full. However, this was good news for the overall goal of improving well-being for youth. The increase in trainings being offered to educators at the institute were emphasizing an integrated, public-health type model in schools called Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). This model attempts to integrate behavioral, health, and academic interventions within a structure of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. Youth in foster care could benefit greatly from this approach, and we will work with AOE to identify opportunities to link with this new initiative.

### ***Lessons learned***

We have learned that one way to engage educational professionals in a conversation and the trainings is to change the language from “educational stability of youth in foster care” to “educational wellbeing for youth who have experienced trauma.” This is just one example of the need to better align language, messaging, and initiatives with education. Many educators told us anecdotally that they were already working on school stability as part of other initiatives, and did not have sufficient time to engage with all of our trainings and resources.

### **Goal 2 Activity 3: Disseminate regular updates on educational stability and outcomes data to multi-disciplinary audiences through reports, newsletters, websites, meetings, and conferences.**

#### ***State the Intervention/Activity***

In addition to providing trainings and resources to improve educational stability, VT-FUTRES also disseminated data on educational stability with regional and state partners.

#### ***Outputs***

- Seven statewide educational stability summary reports were created (two in Year 1, four in Year 2, and a final report during the no-cost extension). These reports were designed to be short and user-friendly to be easy to interpret for a wide audience, and to spark interest in using them as a model for future CQI reports the state could create after VT-FUTRES had ended. The final summary report is in the Appendix showing three school years of data collected.
- In addition to statewide reports, the evaluation team also created district reports which were presented to district offices, local education and community partners, and state agencies.



- These summary reports were shared during many *Rock the GRADES* district presentations, state meetings, and VT-FUTRES conferences.
- A summary report from the Youth Engagement Survey (YES) was also created and disseminated in March 2014. This report shared the findings from the youth-led research study to learn more about the school experiences of youth in custody (see Appendix).
- Our project produced news stories for education, child welfare, court, and family advocacy newsletters; state agency websites; our project website.
- Finally, we are planning to submit two articles for publication based on the youth engagement data collected.

### ***Facilitators in implementing activity***

Many child welfare, education, justice, and other partners were very interested in the educational stability and youth engagement data and information disseminated. This data had not been systematically collected previously, so many were interested and expressed surprise at the variability across districts. The numerous trainings and events we hosted provided an important mechanism for sharing this information, as did the project website. Our partnerships with child welfare at the district and state level, allowed us to join existing meetings to share this information.

### ***Challenges / barriers***

While we felt we reached a wide audience through dissemination across many outlets, we did not receive a great deal of feedback from our dissemination efforts. The data reports often sparked important discussions within districts, but they did not become templates for ongoing state CQI reports as we hoped.

### ***Lessons learned***

We believe that disseminating our data and information to both existing and new outlets is an important strategy for reaching a wide audience. Finding ways to make the information engaging (e.g., sharing real stories) and informative (e.g., infographic format) is important for raising awareness in an overly saturated dissemination market.

## **Goal 2 Activity 4: Collaborate with Vermont Court Improvement Project to disseminate bench cards to judges to ask about educational stability.**

### ***State the Intervention/Activity***

Our team collaborated with the Vermont's Court Improvement Program initiative to disseminate judicial bench cards supporting judges asking about educational stability and outcomes for youth in foster care.

### ***Outputs***

- Bench cards were created and shared with courts in all 12 DCF districts around Vermont (see Appendix D).
- Trainings were provided to judges and court personnel in all 12 DCF districts. Total participants = 199.



- VT-FUTRES met regularly with the Vermont Justice for Children’s Taskforce. That interdisciplinary group is charged with improving outcomes for children in foster care, and school stability was one of their goals. This group helped us connect with judiciary for the bench cards, and to better align our work with existing and new policies.  
<https://www.vermontjudiciary.org/about-vermont-judiciary/boards-and-committees/children-task-force>

### ***Facilitators in implementing activity***

We received ongoing support from personnel supporting the Vermont’s Court Improvement Program initiative. They included our bench card in their resources and grant reporting to promote accountability.

### ***Challenges / barriers***

The Justice for Children’s Taskforce was not meeting regularly during the VT-FUTRES project. Our focus on educational stability aligned well with their goals and help provide momentum for the group to meet more regularly during the grant award.

### ***Lessons learned***

Similar to other activities, an understanding of existing related initiatives and solid working relationships with those leading them, is key for any new project like this.

## **Goal 3: Facilitate the cross-system collection and use of data on educational stability and outcomes of youth in foster care.**

### **Goal 3 Activities:**

1. Create a simple data collection system for RCs to enter and manage data on educational stability and placement.
2. Collaborate with Vermont Agency of Education to analyze data and disseminate findings to track educational outcomes for youth in foster care.
3. Use VT-FUTRES data to inform evolving child welfare and education information management systems to ensure sustainability.

VT-FUTRES will leverage efforts from initiatives in child welfare, education, and courts to build infrastructure capacity for data collection and dissemination.

### **Goal 3 Activity 1: Create a data collection system for educational stability and placement information**

#### ***State the Intervention/Activity***

Because educational stability data for youth in foster care are not systematically reviewed in Vermont, we proposed collecting this information through a simple data collection system that could provide individual, regional, and statewide information.



### ***Outputs***

- We worked closely with Resource Consultants in the first three pilot districts to manually gather educational stability data for all children in custody in those districts. Before this project, educational stability data was only examined for a single district (through BSC), so this was a significant improvement, even though the data system was a simple spreadsheet.
- Through this pilot work, a simple Excel spreadsheet was developed and then shared with all districts in Phase 1, so they could collect this data as well on their own. This essentially spread what was developed under BSC statewide.
- For the remainder of the grant's first year, we worked with our DCF partners to determine what data could be pulled from the state IT systems. We learned that school placement changes were not routinely updated by DCF staff (and were not included in monitoring or reports). Therefore, we worked with our partners to both gain access to the state data, and then proceeded to extensively clean the school placement data based on child living arrangements, information from RCs, and case record review.
- This manual cleaning of educational stability data, yielded the first statewide report of educational stability data in the beginning of year two of the grant.
- Over the course of the project we continued to use (and manually clean) the latest data to ultimately present three school years of educational stability data that could be examined on child, region, and state levels. This had never been accomplished before.

### ***Facilitators***

Both DCF leadership and the data managers have been very generous with their time and resources to facilitate this work. Collecting and monitoring school information has remained a priority of theirs. They gave us unprecedented access to their data systems to conduct our own analyses.

### ***Challenges***

The DCF databases are especially old (~1980s) which impacts the quality of the data entered, the types of connections that can be made across relevant data fields, and even which personnel have the expertise to access the data for analyses. In our first period of this project, our efforts to collaborate with DCF and obtain data were hampered because the primary IT contact took a job outside of state government. During this period a new IT professional was hired, and very soon after our request for DCF placement and school data was met. Subsequently, our project had unprecedented access to data.

### ***Lessons Learned***

Requesting data from state agencies is a significant ask given that most state IT departments are short on personnel and have many demands on their time for required state and national reporting and IT troubleshooting. It is even more complex when the data is as sensitive as placement and locations of children in custody. Given that, we are tremendously grateful for DCF leadership deciding to prioritize this access and for IT personnel to patiently work with our team at UVM to interpret and analyze the data.



### **Goal 3 Activity 2: Collaborate with Agency of Education to Share Educational Data**

#### ***State the Intervention/Activity***

Work with our partners at the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) to identify educational outcomes for children and youth in custody and help disseminate that information.

#### ***Outputs***

- Approximately one year before this project started, the AOE decided to invest resources to report educational outcomes comparing youth in custody and other students in Vermont.
- During the first reporting period of this project, our AOE liaison on SET shared the first findings from this effort: During the 2011-2012 school year, the graduation rate for 12<sup>th</sup> graders in general VT population was 92.7% and the graduation rate for students in foster care was 78.4%.
- During the second reporting period AOE shared a second finding: Statewide achievement scores. Youth in custody scored significantly lower on both Math and Reading test scores than youth not in custody. These results were shared with the Justice for Children's Task Force.
- Our project's recommendation, and that of other task force members, was a more thorough analysis of the data is needed to inform interpretation. For example, it is unknown whether these reductions remain in place after other factors (e.g., disability status, poverty) have been taken into account.
- Throughout the remainder of the project, we met regularly with personnel at the AOE in SET meetings and through the Justice for Children Taskforce, but were not able to obtain any additional data, or access existing databases. Our final recommendations

#### ***Facilitators***

- The AOE was involved in the previous educational stability project through the BSC project. This helped bring them to the table for this child welfare led initiative.
- Our involvement with the Justice for Children Taskforce provided an important venue for raising the need for educational outcome data on children and youth in custody. This ensured this was not simply a one-time request from a temporary grant initiative, but rather data state partners wanted to access.

#### ***Challenges***

- We struggled to collaborate with AOE because our primary contact was ill and ultimately stepped down from their position. While a new person was hired, they had only just started by the time this project ended. This hindered our ability to access school data from AOE for youth in custody.
- Compounding problems AOE experienced both budget cuts and moved offices during this project period.
- Finally, AOE received a grant to develop a new longitudinal data system. While this seemed like a benefit for this project, it meant that limited time and resources were used for planning of the new data system and not on utilizing existing data.



***Lessons Learned***

We believe strongly that there must be a vocal audience for these data, otherwise competing priorities may not allow it to be shared. We worked hard to support and establish the Educational Subcommittee of the Justice for Children Taskforce as that audience, and they have committed to continue to ask for this data to be shared beyond this grant award.

Just as close relationships and alignment with priorities were key to connected with educators regarding trainings and resources, it was also important for data sharing. Our primary goal was to leverage existing data systems and initiatives to collect and examine data in new ways and learned that the existing systems did not have the capacity. Future projects will need to examine not just the capability of data infrastructure, but also the access and availability of state personnel to truly make change or connections to data. It may be helpful to seek agreements to maintain more of this data outside state systems, to provide the analysis and reporting needed for decision-making.

**Goal 3 Activity 3: Use Data to Inform Education and Child Welfare Data Systems*****State the Intervention/Activity***

Another key activity for this project was to help state agencies build sustainable data systems for them to collect, manage, and use this data beyond the grant award.

***Outputs***

- We worked closely with DCF leadership and data managers to identify how educational stability data could be entered accurately and routinely into DCFs existing database, so DCF could run educational stability reports as part of standard monitoring and CQI.
- During this process, DCF agreed that the addition of a few new data fields would be helpful for such reports, and they added several fields that will allow for an improved ability to calculate educational stability data (post grant).
- We helped DCF identify the indicators and analyses that would be most useful for decision making. This included helping them revise both their paper data entry and online data entry forms.
- Finally, we created a draft report that the state could use to analyze and report their own data after the grant ends.

***Facilitators***

The facilitators are the same as Goal 3 Activity #1: Generosity of time by DCF leadership and data managers.

***Challenges***

By the end of the project, DCF had not yet released the new data entry fields for their data system, nor had determined how, or when they would begin creating their own educational stability reports. collection has been stalled due to server upgrades and competing database priorities.





The deaths of two children in custody quite understandably strengthened focus and attention on safety as a priority, making discussions and infrastructure change on well-being more challenging by the end of the project. In addition, DCF systems were relatively old and DCF had been exploring upgrades to their databases, putting projects like this on hold. Our response has been to create a draft of the data documentation and sample report for DCF when they are ready to move forward with this data collection and analyses. Dr. Suter will make himself available to DCF when the upgrades are complete and DCF is ready.

## **Goal 4: Engage youth in sharing their experiences to positively influence infrastructure development around educational stability.**

### **Goal 4 Activities:**

1. Partner with youth in Vermont who were in foster care to take leadership roles in improving educational stability and outcomes for middle and high school students.
2. Engage youth leadership teams in sharing their educational experiences through outlets such as video and social marketing outlets.

### **Goal 4 Activity 1: Engage youth in leadership roles to improve educational stability and other academic outcomes for youth in custody.**

#### ***State the Intervention / Activity***

Members of VT-FUTRES met with youth formerly in foster care to identify ways they would like to inform and improve state services. Originally, we planned to help create regional leadership teams, and instead the youth wanted to conduct a research study.

#### ***Outputs***

- We met with existing regional youth development teams to plan our youth engagement efforts. We spoke with other service providers who coordinate youth teams about how we could partner with them to help students express their views on educational success to avoid creating completely new youth groups.
- Project staff attended the Vermont Youth Development Conference and invited youth to participate in our project and join our SET.
- We met with the regional youth development coordinators and STEPS students (former youth in foster care who are currently enrolled in St. Joseph's College) to describe the overall project and seek input on ways they could lead this work.
- Through these meetings, the participating youth stated they wanted to conduct their own research study, and so the work shifted away from creating youth leadership teams (they felt these were in place) to development and administration of the *Youth Education Survey* (YES).
- This research survey was led by our undergraduate research assistants, who submitted the project for IRB approval, and worked with the youth participants to administer the survey



to foster youth ages 15-22 across the state through the youth development coordinators ( $n = 102$ ).

- In addition, our project co-developed (with the youth) an interview protocol to accompany the YES (the YES-I) for youth who wanted to share more in-depth stories about their educational successes and challenges.
- Youth decided they wanted to present the data in two ways: (1) presentation at youth development conference and (2) Legislative Speak Out (i.e., they testified before Education committees at Vermont Statehouse).
  - The first presentation of the YES findings occurred at a statewide youth development conference. At this presentation, the youth presented the survey results and engaged participants in a dialogue about concrete strategies for maintaining youth in their home communities and schools.
  - Project staff also went to the Vermont State House with six undergraduate students attending St. Joseph's College STEPS program. The purpose was to meet with legislators, share findings from the YES, and provide an opportunity for these students to testify before two legislative committees (education and health and human services). Using the self-reported data combined with the personal narratives, the young adults testified on the challenges and facilitators they experienced going to school while in state custody. Although it did not pass during the most recent legislative session, a new bill was introduced that would require educational stability for all children in the state.
- Mary Kate Schroeter our project's undergraduate research assistant finished data collection for the YES and created a summary report of initial findings. Our graduate research assistant, Matt Werrbach has been conducting qualitative interviews (the YES Interview) around the state.
- This data was shared in the final six months of the grant, and manuscripts were submitted for publication.

### ***Facilitators***

The Vermont Youth Development Coordinator supported this project by connecting us with the regional youth teams. Undergraduate students from UVM and St. Joseph's College STEPS program facilitated the original youth meetings. The coordinator also helped disseminate the YES and recruited volunteers for the YES-I. Undergraduate students from UVM and St. Joseph's College STEPS program are going to facilitate youth speak out along with a state legislator, Ann Pugh. There has been an unexpected enthusiastic youth response to the YES and YES-I which has made the project easier to implement.

### ***Challenges***

Having youth attend executive meetings was a significant challenge due to scheduling conflicts and transportation. There were multiple service providers in the state asking for youth input and organizations need to work together so as not to ask youth to join too many separate teams.

### ***Lessons Learned***

Future projects need more flexibility in scheduling quarterly executive meetings so youth can attend in a more meaningful way. The opportunity to engage youth in a participatory action research study was very powerful and a great fit for a university-based project like VT-FUTRES.



Given the enthusiasm, we will seek more opportunities to engage youth in this way moving forward.

#### **Goal 4 Activity 2: Engage youth in sharing their educational experiences through video and social marketing outlets.**

##### ***State the Intervention / Activity***

To promote self-determination, raise awareness, and affect state practice and policy VT-FUTRES worked with youth to share their experiences in school while in foster care.

##### ***Outputs***

- Overlapping with the last activity, we met with groups of former youth in foster care to see if they were interested in sharing their personal school experiences.
- The youth were not interested in using social media as they decided not enough providers and policy makers used it. Instead, they wanted to create a professional video.
- During this reporting period, our team has begun working with Vermont documentary filmmaker Bess O'Brien to create a short educational film on school experiences of youth in care. She has recruited several young adults to be interviewed for the film, and our team has drafted interview questions and school stability facts to share in the film.
- VT-FUTRES teamed with Vermont filmmaker, Bess O'Brien (<http://kingdomcounty.org/about/bess/>), create a brief documentary (approximately 15 minutes) about the educational experiences of foster care alumni from across the state. Bess has an extensive history of working with youth in care to share their stories through film making, including, "Ask Us Who We Are", the "Voices Project" and "The Hungry Heart".
- Young people interested in being interviewed for the documentary were solicited and interviewed. The 17 min. educational film, *No Decision About Me, Without Me: School Stories of Youth in Custody* was finished in Year 2 of the grant and premiered at our fall statewide conference: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2iSnyUrjQ8>
- We also created a 12-page companion Discussion Guide (see Appendix E) to elicit discussion after viewings and prompt the development of local strategies. The film, discussion guide, and *Rock the GRADES* toolkit were packaged into flash drives and distributed to social workers, educators, administrators, and other community partners. The film and other materials were also posted to our website.
- Several young adults who testified with the Vermont Legislature, were interviewed for the film. During the two days of our statewide conference, two young adults helped present the film, shared their personal experiences with school, and led discussions with the audiences.
- During the no-cost-extension when we specifically targeted schools and educational audiences, we recruited 3 youth who co-presented at 7 of our 25 Educational Stability presentations where we also screened this film.

##### ***Facilitators***

We received a great deal of support connecting with young adults from STEPS students and the Vermont Youth Development Coordinator. They were very engaged in our project and well-



received by all audiences. Working with Bess O'Brien was also a significant benefit as originally we planned on hiring a young adult to video and edit the film. Choosing a professional who had expertise creating documentaries, particularly about youth at-risk, allowed the youth to spend more time focusing on their experiences and not creating the product.

### ***Challenges***

As above, it was hard to engage youth in regular meetings to benefit from their perspectives on the other aspects of this project. We also would have liked to have a youth co-presenter at all trainings. Timing, distance, transportation were all significant barriers. With that said, the YES research studies and this film were amazing contributions, and they went significantly beyond what dissemination activities we expected to produce.

### ***Lessons Learned***

Engaging youth in collaborative and leadership roles can be challenging on any project. As with other elements of VT-FUTRES we learned how important it is to reach out to existing groups and projects that have youth leadership, namely the Youth Development Project and St. Joseph's STEPS program for providing post-secondary education to youth who were in custody.

## **Project Outcome Evaluation**

This outline of Youth and Systems outcomes follows our proposed VT-FUTRES logic model. We have included only short-term outcomes here because, as stated in our proposal, we did not propose achieving the long-term outcomes during the timeframe of this project.

### **Short-Term Youth Outcomes**

#### **A. Increase Educational Stability**

1. **Expected Outcome:** This outcome has been operationalized as *Percentage of school-age youth in custody who did not change schools for the entire school year.*

We have collected, cleaned, and analyzed school stability data for three school years meaning we can report on school stability for 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 school years. These span the school year before VT-FUTRES was awarded and the two school years occurring at the same time as our project. The DCF data system (SSMIS), and the paper DCF Placement Change Form, include fields for recording basic school information (school name, school city, grade, date entered school, date entered grade, special education status). However, entering and updating school information for youth in custody is not part of common practice. This means that while some children and youth in custody have some school information available, many do not, and the data that is available is often inaccurate. Therefore, VT-FUTRES staff manually reviewed the case files and revised the data, checking every student in custody during this timeframe.

In addition, VT-FUTRES engaged a group of 10 youth formerly in custody, who designed and administered a survey called the Youth Engagement Survey (YES) to youth in foster care (15-21 years).



The result of these data collection efforts is that our project provided the first statewide analyses and reporting of school stability data in Vermont and individually for all 12 districts.

## 2. Findings from evaluation:

The table below summarizes school stability findings for school age youth during the three school years. In addition, the number of school-age youth for each year are reported, as well as the school stability change between the school years, and whether the change was statistically significant (chi-square test).

District	Percent School Stability			Change	p
	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014		
1	71%	70%	67%	-4%	ns
2	74%	61%	66%	-8%	ns
3	72%	79%	63%	-9%	ns
4	64%	65%	65%	1%	ns
5	76%	48%	80%	4%	0.001
6	71%	67%	71%	0%	ns
7	75%	83%	89%	14%	ns
8	46%	65%	80%	34%	0.001
9	54%	54%	59%	5%	ns
10	65%	72%	76%	11%	ns
11	59%	67%	64%	5%	ns
12	70%	79%	74%	4%	ns
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>65.0%</b>	<b>67.3%</b>	<b>68.4%</b>	<b>3.4%</b>	<b>ns</b>
<b>Students in custody</b>	<b>922</b>	<b>909</b>	<b>843</b>		

*Note:* ns = not significant

**School stability findings.** Approximately 2/3 of all school-age children and youth in Vermont stayed in the same school for the entire school year and this increased slightly across the three years (65% in 2011-2012, 67% in 2012-2013, 68% in 2013-2014). School stability percentages ranged from a low of 46% to a high of 89% representing a great deal of variability across districts and years. Two districts should statistically significant changes from one school year to the next: District 5 showed a significant decrease in 2013 (which then increased in 2014) and District 8 had a significant increase with each year showing improvement. Overall, 8 districts showed increases in school stability from 2012 to 2014, 3 showed decreases, and 1 had no change. Statewide school stability increased 3.4%, but this modest increase was not statistically significant. Now with three years of school stability data, the state and districts can begin to set benchmarks for what they hope to achieve in the coming years.

The second table below digs a little deeper into the school stability numbers. This table only reports on school stability for school-age children and youth *who changed towns at*



*some point in the school year.* We expected that districts would have a harder time maintaining school stability when the youth were no longer in the same town.

District	Percent School Stability			Change	p
	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014		
1	40%	40%	29%	-11%	ns
2	41%	6%	24%	-17%	0.05
3	43%	14%	30%	-13%	ns
4	23%	29%	26%	3%	ns
5	55%	11%	33%	-22%	0.01
6	30%	34%	41%	11%	ns
7	31%	56%	67%	36%	ns
8	22%	20%	33%	11%	ns
9	10%	21%	19%	9%	ns
10	20%	26%	37%	17%	ns
11	22%	22%	22%	0%	ns
12	44%	47%	27%	-17%	ns
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>28.5%</b>	<b>27.4%</b>	<b>28.8%</b>	<b>0.3%</b>	<b>ns</b>
<b>Students in custody</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>379</b>		

*Note:* ns = not significant

*School stability for youth who change towns.* As expected, school stability percentages were much lower when youth changed towns during the school year. Fewer than 1/3 of Vermont youth (29% in 2011-2012, 27% in 2012-2013, and 29% in 2013-2014) stayed in the same school for the whole school year if they changed towns. Similar to the full sample school stability, percentages varied widely among Vermont districts (min: 6% max: 67%). Half of the districts showed an increase, 5 decreased, and 1 showed no change. Only two districts showed significant differences between the school years (Districts 2 & 5), and both were reductions in school stability. Statewide percentages remained stable over these three years.

*School stability findings from YES.* The YES data collection was not longitudinal, so cannot speak to improvements in educational stability over the course of this project. However, it provides a more in-depth understanding of how school stability is related to school outcomes and experiences.

Note: School stability numbers cannot be directly compared to those shared above. “School stability” from the DCF data was examined year-by-year and a percentage of all youth in each district or statewide who did not change schools during the school year. School stability from YES is a percentage calculated by taking the total number of schools attended (elementary, middle, and high), subtracting three for normal school changes (1 elementary + 1 middle + 1 high) based on grade, and dividing by the total number of home placements.





*Mean Values for Number of Placements, Schools, and School Stability for School Status of Youth completing Youth Engagement Survey (n = 102)*

School Status	n	Number of Placements	Number of Schools	School Stability
Dropped out	8	16.0 (12.0)	9.0 (3.5)	52% (38%)
Completed HS no college	32	6.9 (6.9)	5.8 (2.3)	50% (37%)
In high school (HS)	47	4.0 (5.4)	6.4 (2.8)	66% (37%)
In college	15	4.0 (1.9)	6.3 (2.1)	77% (27%)
Significance		$p < .001$	$p < .1$	$p < .1$

3. **Interpretation:** To interpret these results it is important to understand several considerations. First, the 2011-2012 school year occurred before this grant was awarded, 2012-2013 school year overlaps with Year 1 of VT-FUTRES, and 2013-2014 overlaps with Year 2. In Year 1, our project provided trainings and TA to only half of the 12 districts, this was by design but means that half of the regions did not receive supports from our project that would be expected to impact school stability. Second, even for the districts who did receive supports from us, for many the supports did not ramp up until close to the end of the school year. Third, these data have never been examined in Vermont before, so there is no understanding of how stable or variable they can be from year to year. Fourth, while our team did our best to validate and update school information based on case notes, in a small number of cases this could not be done with a high level of confidence.

The feedback from youth in custody on the YES also showed students can experience a wide range of home and school placements, and that students with more positive school outcomes experienced more school stability on average.

With those considerations in mind, the primary two findings are: (a) wide variability in school stability across Vermont's 12 DCF districts and (b) only a few significant changes within districts from one school year to the next. One strong predictor of school stability was identified: Whether or not the youth changed towns during the school year. Strong negative correlations were found between the percentage of youth who change towns and school stability percentages. In other words, the more youth who changed towns, the fewer who stayed in the same schools. While this seems logical, it underscores the importance of interpreting school stability through other placement contexts.

## **B. Reduce Number of School Days Missed During Transition**

1. **Expected Outcome:** Reduce number of days between the last day attended old school to first day attended at new school.

At the beginning of the grant, this was one of the outcomes that Resource Coordinators in three districts manually gathered. They were asked to report the number of school days missed for youth changing schools. We then added up the number of school days missed to calculate the total days missed per youth.





As we began working with DCF IT personnel to collect educational stability data using their data system we had hoped this outcome could also be examined centrally. Unfortunately, we were not able to obtain this data from our child welfare or education partners. DCF data dates of attendance were not entered consistently or reliably enough to calculate this. We requested that DCF add these dates to their database (SSMIS), however the burden was considered too great for data collection when much of the information would likely still be estimates only.

## 2. Findings from evaluation:

The number of youth with data on number of missing days, the mean total days missed, and ranges are reported below. These data were only from the first year of the grant award and were manually collated by Resource Coordinators in three districts.

DCF District	# Youth	<i>M</i> Days Missed	<i>Range</i>
District #1	31	3.8	0 to 29
District #2	21	8.0	0 to 47
District #3	32	2.0	0 to 22
Combined	84	4.2	0 to 47

## 3. Interpretation:

Across these three districts the average number of school days missed is nearly a week. The number of days missed varies across districts and especially among individual students. Many youth were reported to miss no days of school between transitions, while some missed over three weeks of school. It is noteworthy that District #2 that reported reduced school stability compared to the other districts also reported more school days missed. Caution is necessary for interpreting these numbers because some of these numbers were estimates and the number of days missed was not reported for 20% of this sample that changed schools.

Ultimately the best source of this information is the schools, however individual schools and districts do not have a consistent way of providing this information to child welfare. Sharing this data with individual social workers is important, but a much better solution would be to permit data sharing that would allow immediate access to this data to reduce time out of school. In addition, VT-FUTRES personnel helped DCF create new data entry fields in their data collection for school data. This included a field asking how many days of school were missed.

## C. Reduce School Records Transfer Time

### 1. Expected Outcome: Reduce number of days it takes for school records to be transferred to new school over the course of the grant.

We examined DCF case records for several months during this grant award and have found that DCF does not consistently track this information. The only source of data has been feedback from DCF personnel during trainings and technical assistance visits.



## 2. Findings from evaluation:

Speaking with DCF Resource Coordinators and social workers, most report no problems accessing records when needed.

## 3. Interpretation:

Taken at face value, DCF personnel do not report difficulties accessing school records following placement changes. However, that should not be taken as evidence of timely transfer of records, nor that transfer time has improved. Similar to other educational outcomes, our project strongly recommended that child welfare and education enter into data sharing agreements to provide electronic access to these data so they can be used for case planning and for aggregate reporting and decision-making. In addition, VT-FUTRES personnel helped DCF create new data entry fields in their data collection for school data. This included a field indicating whether school records had been shared with DCF.

## D. Increase Attendance

### 1. Expected Outcome: Reduce the number of excused and unexcused absences of youth in foster care over the course of the grant.

This is a critical indicator of student engagement with school and a predictor of graduation (and dropout). Unfortunately, student attendance data was not available in the DCF system, consistently included in case plans, or provided by schools or AOE. However, the Youth Engagement Survey (YES) did collect data on students who dropped out of school (an extreme example of disengagement and attendance) compared to other school outcomes.

### 2. Findings from evaluation:

Anecdotally, social workers reported concerns about the attendance of youth in custody, however these were often less of a concern than safety, living placement, and enrollment and transportation to school.

While attendance data was not provided, AOE did provide two educational outcomes comparing students who were and were not in custody for the 2011-2012 school year: (1) Youth in custody scored significantly lower on both Math and Reading test scores than youth not in custody. (2), The graduation rate for 12<sup>th</sup> graders in general VT population was 92.7% and the graduation rate for students in foster care was 78.4%.

From the YES findings, 8 students said they had dropped out of school. Compared to students in college ( $n = 15$ ), students who dropped out reported attending more schools (9 vs. 6) and had many more living placements (16 vs. 5).

### 3. Interpretation:

Attendance is a predictor of academic achievement and graduation, so the findings provided by AOE implied attendance rates were likely lower for youth in custody as well. In addition, the YES findings indicate that if educational and placement stability can be increased, students may be more likely to attend school and less likely to dropout. As



mentioned earlier, VT-FUTRES helped DCF design a new data entry screen to track more school outcomes. While social workers are not directly asked to enter attendance data, they are expected to have the student's report card, and note that in the data entry screen. This should provide more consistent access to this data for social workers.

#### **E. Increased Number of Coordinated Services Plans (CSP)**

- 1. Expected Outcome:** Child welfare workers will form more interagency teams (e.g., Coordinated Services Plans) to assist with best interest determination, school success, and well-being over the course of the grant.

Child welfare staff in 3 districts were asked to report which youth during the study time frame had Coordinated Services Plans (CSPs), Individualized Education Plans (IEPs, special education), or Educational Support Team Plans (ESTs; essentially a plan for students at-risk, but without an identified disability). These were then combined to determine if youth had any type of plan. Following this manual data collection, we examined case plans and files but could not find additional information about the types of interagency and school-based support plans.

#### **2. Findings from evaluation:**

DCF District	% CSPs	% IEPs	% ESTs	Any plan
District #1	32%	50%	13%	95%
District #2	-	39%	0%	> 39%
District #3	0%	25%	0%	25%

#### **3. Interpretation:**

Based on the manual data collection in three districts, the type of plan the youth was receiving was only known for approximately 50% of youth. This high level of missing data makes interpretation of findings highly suspect. The reported percentage of youth receiving a CSP appeared relatively low compared to special education plans (IEPs), but higher than ESTs.

As with other school outcomes that were not accessible, we successfully had them added to a new data collection screen for DCF to have moving forward.

#### **F. Increased Education Stability Focus in CSPs AND**

#### **G. Improve Youth & Parent Engagement in Plans**

- 1. Expected Outcome:** These outcomes were combined due to their similarity. Both focus on the content of coordinated plans conducted for youth in custody that are also receiving supports in school. It was anticipated that more plans would focus on educational stability and have more youth and family engagement as a result of this statewide project.

The original plan was to review data collected through existing surveys from other DCF projects, however these surveys were no longer administered. Instead we conducted a review of case plans, but they mostly did not mention Coordinated Services Plans, and



those did not include sufficient information for a content analysis about their emphasis on school stability and engagement.

*A survey conducted by the Vermont Court Improvement Program* about the educational stability of students in custody did ask Vermont Judges for their perspective on two related items:

- *Well-being inquiries result in more thorough court hearings.*
- *These judicial inquiries promote family engagement in court proceedings.*

*The Youth Engagement Survey (YES)* also included questions related to youth engagement. Specifically, three subscales of the *Student Engagement Instrument* (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006) were used: (a) teacher–student relationships, (b) peer supports for learning, and (c) future goals and expectations.

## 2. Findings from evaluation:

*Findings from Vermont Court Improvement Program survey.* While the originally planned survey data was not available, Vermont judges provided an interdisciplinary perspective on this issue.

All judges (12 out of 13 responded to the survey) agreed that well-being inquiries and judicial inquiries about educational stability result in better hearings and improve family engagement. Comments from judges included:

- *Especially [important] if the child is present [for hearing]*
- *Bringing this issue up in court increases everyone’s awareness and promotes greater attention with better results.*
- *Many times it prompts more engagement by the child with me. I try to praise the child both for the benefit of the child and the parents.*
- *Not always time.*
- *One difficulty is when placement is with a family member who may not be in the same district. [...] It is very important that this be discussed (education piece) early on when these placement decisions are being made.*

*Youth engagement findings from YES.* The YES data collection was not longitudinal, so cannot speak to improvements in youth engagement over the course of this project. However, it provides a more in-depth understanding of how engagement is related to school outcomes and experiences. YES included three sub-scales of the *Student Engagement Instrument*: The teacher–student relationships subscale had nine items, including: “adults in this school listen to me,” “teachers are there for me when I need them,” and “teachers at my school care about students” ( $\alpha = .94$ ). The peer supports for learning subscale had a total of six items, including: “students at school care about me” and “I enjoy talking with students here” ( $\alpha = .92$ ). Finally, the future goals and expectations subscale had five items, such as “school is important for achieving my future goals” and “going to school after high school is important” ( $\alpha = .91$ ). These items



use a likert-type scale from 1 to 4 with higher ratings indicating higher student engagement (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*).

***Mean Values for Number of Placements, Schools, and School Stability for School Engagement of Youth completing Youth Engagement Survey (n = 102)***

School Status	<i>n</i>	Teacher- Student Relationships	Peer Relationships	Future Expectations
Dropped out	8	2.5 (0.41)	2.9 (0.18)	2.9 (0.59)
Completed HS no college	32	2.7 (0.54)	2.6 (0.61)	3.0 (0.60)
In high school (HS)	47	3.2 (0.50)	3.0 (0.58)	3.4 (0.63)
In college	15	3.3 (0.67)	3.1 (0.67)	3.7 (0.47)
<b>Significance</b>		<b><i>p</i> &lt; .001</b>	<b><i>p</i> &lt; .01</b>	<b><i>p</i> &lt; .001</b>

Students who attended college after high school rated teacher–student relationships, peer support, and future expectations higher than students who did not continue on to high school. Qualitatively, 88% reported that an adult talked to them about college. However, among youth attending college, 100% reported that an adult spoke with them about college compared to only 80% of youth who dropped out of high school.

The former foster students who helped design YES were particularly interested in how students in custody exhibited resilience and chose to attend college. 46 students met this definition of *educational resilience* in that they were attending college (*n* = 15) or were still in high school but had plans to attend college (*n* = 31). Logistic regression analysis showed that student engagement significantly predicted educational resilience in these youth (Odds ratio 4.5 [2.4 – 8.4], *p* < .001), but age, race, gender, and number of living placements were not significant predictors. Looking at the student engagement subscales, *teacher-student relationships* was a significant predictor of educational resilience (Odds ratio 8.41 [2.6 – 26.7], *p* < .001), but peer relationships was not.

Qualitative feedback revealed three themes that students in foster care shared as the most helpful supports received in school. The themes (% of participants who endorsed them) and exemplar quotes are shared here:

***Self-regulation skills and emotional support*** (65% of participants)

“During my time in a few foster homes my teachers were the most evident source of support I had. Also with my ADHD, my teachers helped me focus and learn.”

***Concrete supports*** (45%)

“My school gave credit for service to the community which helped me to graduate while giving me life skills.”

***High expectations*** (25%)

“My teacher pushed me to finish my reports and to continue my education,”



***Challenges at school focused on lack of stability (50%)***

- “If I went to a different house, I had to go to a different school,”
- “The biggest challenge was being moved so many times ‘cause I didn’t have a chance to do the schooling. It was exhausting.”
- “Transitions were always in the middle of school. I was always late.”

**3. Interpretation:**

***Responses from 12 out of 13 judges*** presiding over the 14 Vermont county courts is important given their ability to raise issues of educational stability when placement decisions are decided. These judges unanimously agree that questions about well-being and educational stability need to be asked during placement decisions and improve the process. Challenges raised included having time in hearings to discuss educational stability, and when placement with a family member puts the student in another school district.

***Youth participants for the YES*** (survey and interviews) shared experiences, challenges, and successes that highlighted the importance of school stability, engagement, and positive relationships. Student ratings of engagement were positively correlated with educational resilience and educational success. More specifically, supportive adults, high expectations, and supportive peers were identified as important contributors for educational stability and success through both quantitative and qualitative findings. This suggests that positive relationships with adult mentors and positive peer influences can ease transitions related to placement change, and reinforce emotional connections which may reduce the impact of trauma while facilitating educational success and post-secondary attendance. The interviews illuminate the importance of structured, intentional transitions that allow for continuity in the educational experience.

***The primary limitation*** of these data is it is unknown how this information is included in Coordinated Services Plans led by DCF or education. Given the lack of data from child welfare and education, our primary efforts were placed in helping the state collect and use this information. The new DCF school data entry form now includes questions on the types of plans the student has. This will provide a starting point for the state to begin tracking this information, so a more detailed analysis can be conducted.

## Short-Term System Outcomes

**A. Increased awareness of importance of educational stability**

**1. Expected Outcome:** Increase in ratings by second year of grant for *Community Readiness Survey* questions:

- How concerned would you say people in your community are about ensuring educational stability for youth in foster care? [1 = Not at all & 10 = Very concerned]*
- How concerned are the leaders in your community about ensuring educational stability for youth in foster care? [1 = Not at all & 10 = Very concerned]*





- c. *How aware are people in your community of the efforts you described earlier?* [1 = No awareness 10 = Very aware]

**Data collected to address this outcome:** The *Community Readiness Survey* was completed by 45 district leaders and community partners during Year 1 of this grant. In the final reporting period we collected follow up data from 29 district leaders who participated in more than one training with our project.

## 2. Findings from evaluation:

Indicator	Mean Year 1	Mean Year 2
<i>How concerned are people in your community?</i>	6.3	6.4
<i>How concerned are leaders?</i>	6.8	6.5
<i>How aware are people in your community?</i>	4.3	5.4

**Note:** Scale ranges from 1 (lowest rating) to 10 (highest rating).

## 3. Interpretation:

District partners reported very little change with the level of concern about educational stability by their communities as wholes and by community leaders. However, they reported a modest increase in community awareness about this topic, with the mean moving from below to above the midpoint on the 10-point scale. This suggests that our outreach efforts may have had some modest success at raising awareness of educational stability for youth in foster care, but those efforts are not necessarily changing priorities of partners around the state. A limitation in interpreting these findings is that we cannot separate out the same respondents for Years 1 & 2. It is possible that the original 45 have responses that differ from the Year 2 sample, but the anonymous survey does not permit such analysis. With that said, they self-identified as participating in multiple trainings with our project so we believe there is fair level of overlap.

## B. Increased skills, knowledge, and capacities of multi-disciplinary providers

- Expected Outcome:** Multi-disciplinary providers will report increased satisfaction, skills, knowledge, and capacities after participating in VT-FUTRES trainings and presentations.

**Data collected to address this outcome:** As described earlier in this report, VT-FUTRES personnel provided over 200 trainings and technical assistance events, for nearly 1,500 participants over the course of the 2 ½ years of this project. Participants were asked to complete training evaluations. Approximately 2/3 of participants ( $n = 926$ ) provided feedback on their satisfaction with trainings and 1/3 ( $n = 462$ ) provided more detailed feedback presented below.

## 2. Findings from evaluation:

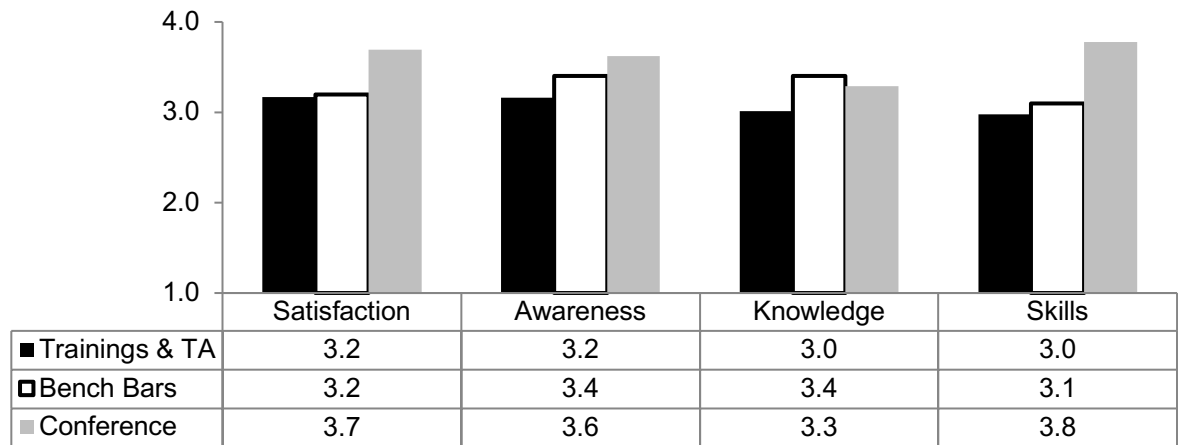
Findings are presented separately for three types of trainings: (a) General VT-FUTRES trainings and technical assistance, (b) Bench Bar Presentations, and (c) the VT-FUTRES conference. Mean responses to training evaluation questions are summarized below.



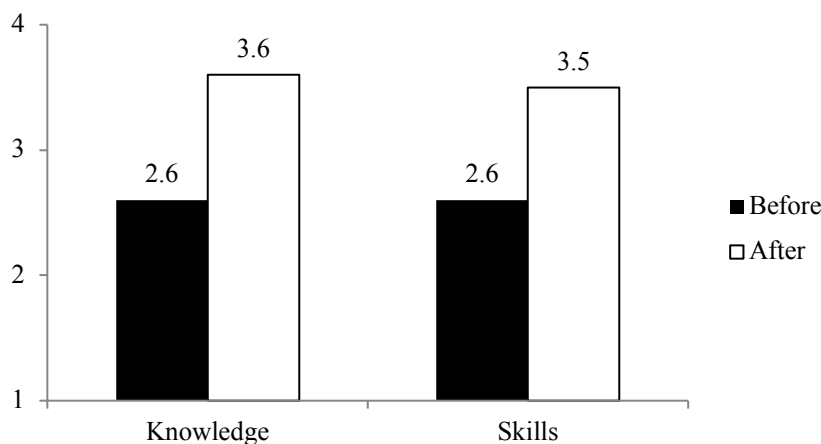
Ratings ranged from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 4 = *Strongly agree*, and the items were:

- Overall, I was satisfied with this activity.
- This activity increased my awareness of the education needs of youth in foster care.
- This activity increased my knowledge about the Rock the GRADES toolkit.
- This activity increased my skills to improve educational success for youth in foster care.

***Mean Ratings from Participants of Trainings & TA (n = 245), Bench Bar Presentations (n = 51), and VT-FUTRES Conference (n = 166)***



In addition, participants of the VT-FUTRES Conference were asked to report on their level of knowledge and skills before and immediately after the conference. Ratings were *Strongly Agree* (4), *Agree* (3), *Disagree* (2), and *Strongly Disagree* (1).



- 3. Interpretation:** Overall, the majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that VT-FUTRES trainings, technical assistance, and presentations increased their satisfaction (97%), awareness (94%), knowledge (85%), skills (91%), related to educational stability.



Mean ratings for the different types of trainings showed most positive ratings from participants of the VT-FUTRES conference (a day-long event) for satisfaction, awareness, and skills (though not knowledge). Participants of the Bench Bar presentations provided slightly more positive ratings than other types of VT-FUTRES trainings. In addition, the pre and post questions from the VT-FUTRES Conference show significant increases in reported knowledge and skills gained over the course of the training day.

### C. Use of training components by participants

- 1. Expected Outcome:** Multi-disciplinary providers will report use of resources and strategies after participating in VT-FUTRES trainings and presentations.

**Data collected to address this outcome:** As described above, VT-FUTRES personnel provided over 200 trainings and technical assistance events, for nearly 1,500 participants over the course of the 2 ½ years of this project. Participants were asked to complete training evaluations. Approximately 2/3 of participants ( $n = 926$ ) provided feedback on their satisfaction with trainings and 1/3 ( $n = 462$ ) provided more detailed feedback presented below. In addition, the Vermont Court Improvement Project administered a survey to Vermont justices on educational stability (12 out of 13 judges responded).

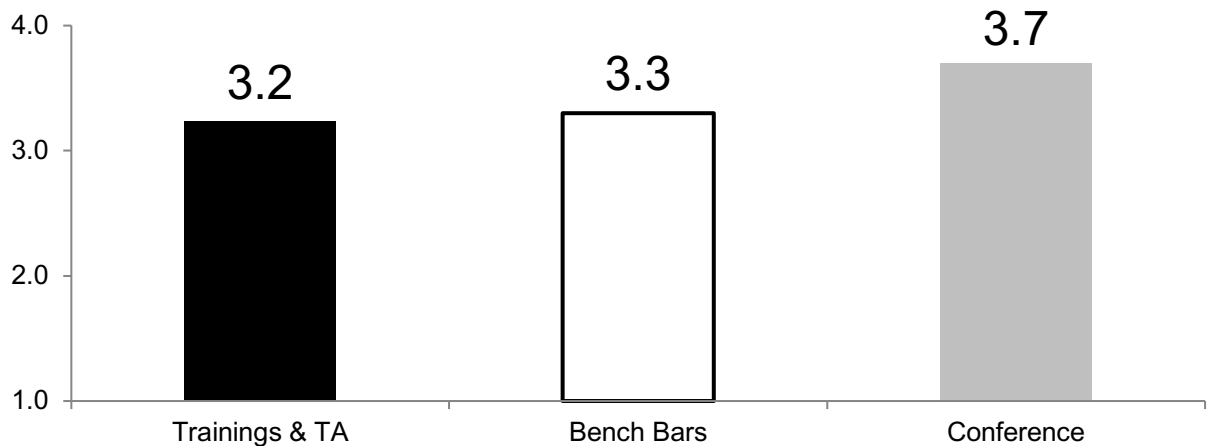
- 2. Findings from evaluation:**

Findings are presented separately for three types of trainings: (a) General VT-FUTRES trainings and technical assistance, (b) Bench Bar Presentations, and (c) the VT-FUTRES conference. Judges responses to the Vermont Court Improvement Project survey are included after the training evaluation feedback.

Mean responses to training evaluation questions are summarized below. Utility ratings ranged from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 4 = *Strongly agree*, and the item was:

- I will use what I learned at this training / conference / activity.

**Mean Ratings for “Use of Training” from Participants of Trainings & TA ( $n = 245$ ), Bench Bar Presentations ( $n = 51$ ), and VT-FUTRES Conference ( $n = 166$ )**



***Vermont Court Improvement Project Survey with Vermont Judges***

Responses from 12 (out of 13) Vermont judges speak to their implementation of efforts to promote educational stability for students in custody.

VCIP Survey question	Choices	Responses
During hearings, do you inquire about a school age child's educational stability (keeping the child in same school if there is a change in placement)?	No Not yet Sometimes Routinely	0% 0% 42% 58%
If you inquire about educational stability, typically when do you do this?	At each stage At permanency hearing Whenever placement is discussed	75% 8% 17%
Do you ask about a child's school engagement (attendance, performance, extra-curricular activities, social adjustment)?	No Not yet Sometimes Routinely	0% 0% 50% 50%
In hearings involving (middle and high school) youth, do you inquire about planning for post-secondary education?	No Not yet Sometimes Routinely	0% 8% 50% 42%
Do you tend to inquire more often about educational stability, school engagement, and educational success when the child is at the hearing?	No Yes	42% 58%
When middle and high school youth come to court, do you ask them about their educational goals, challenges, and interests?	No Not yet Sometimes Routinely	0% 0% 42% 50%
How do you use the bench card "Questions to Ensure That the Educational Needs of Children and Youth in Foster Care Are Being Addressed"?	I don't use / don't have it Mostly don't ask Occasionally use Ask many questions	13% 20% 20% 47%

**3. Interpretation:**

***Training Evaluations.*** Similar to the other training evaluation items, participants of the VT-FUTRES conference had the most positive ratings, while slightly more Bench Bar participants reported they would use the information presented to them than general VT-FUTRES trainings and TA. Nearly all respondents agreed that they would use what they learned across these trainings (97%).

***Judges Behaviors re: Educational Stability.*** Approximately half of the Vermont presiding judges report routinely ask about educational stability and educational issues (engagement, transition, goals). In addition, most (75%) report doing at each stage of a child's involvement with the court. Similarly, nearly half (47%) of judges report actively



using the bench card or asking many of the questions on it throughout the process. These findings shows that many children and youth in custody benefit from these key decision makers being aware of the importance of educational stability. They also reveal that half of judges could more regularly focus on educational stability. This underscores the importance of our work to (a) inform the bench card, (b) provide bench bar presentations in every court, and (c) meet regularly with the Vermont Justice for Children’s Taskforce – the standing leadership group in the best position to sustain and improve the progress made with VT-FUTRES.

#### **D. Improved perception of cross-disciplinary collaborations to improve educational success of foster youth**

- 1. Expected Outcome:** Increase in ratings by second year of grant for Community Readiness Survey question: *Using a scale from 1 to 10, how willing are people in your community to improve educational stability for youth in foster care?* [1 = Not at all AND 10 = Very willing]

**Data collected to address this outcome:** The Community Readiness Survey has been completed by 45 district leaders in the first year of this grant. In the past reporting period we collected follow up data from 25 district leaders.

- 2. Findings from evaluation:**

Indicator	Mean Year 1	Mean Year 2
<i>How willing are people in your community to improve educational stability for youth in foster care?</i>	6.5	7.1

- 3. Interpretation:**

A modest increase was reported for this indicator from year 1 to year 2. This could mean that our work sparked some investment in working on this issue. A limitation in interpreting these findings is that we cannot separate out the same respondents for Years 1 & 2. It is possible that the original 45 have responses that differ from the larger sample, but the anonymous survey does not permit such analysis. A limitation in interpreting these findings is that we cannot separate out the same respondents for Years 1 & 2. It is possible that the original 45 have responses that differ from the Year 2 sample, but the anonymous survey does not permit such analysis. With that said, they self-identified as participating in multiple trainings with our project so we believe there is fair level of overlap.

#### **E. State policy recommendations and changes**

- 1. Expected Outcome:** Evidence from meeting notes with State Executive Team (SET), legislative actions, and child welfare and education policy briefs should demonstrate adoption of policy recommendations from this infrastructure grant.

**Data collected to address this outcome:** Meeting notes from all meetings with SET were reviewed. Specifically, for this reporting period we evaluated the outcomes from the ten activities in this reporting period to determine whether they lead to sustainable changes in Vermont.



- 2. Findings from evaluation:** During the current reporting period we examined the status of each of our activities in the current reporting period. We judged that 6 were successful, 3 were partially successful, and 1 was not successful:

Activity	Evaluation
Activity 1: Disseminate Rock the GRADES Intervention and Toolkit	<b>Successful:</b> Rock the GRADES toolkit has been handed off to state partners and there is commitment to use these resources moving forward.
Activity 2: Finalize Accessible and Sustainable Website for Rock the GRADES Information	<b>Successful:</b> Website is complete and will be available for at least 5 years following the VT-FUTRES grant.
Activity 3: Ensure Rock the GRADES Elements are in State Training Manuals and DCF Policy & Guidance Documents	<b>Successful:</b> As outlined above, we successfully incorporated ROCK the GRADES information into several state resources in widespread use in Vermont.
Activity #4: Feedback and Guidance for Proposed Bill on School Stability	<b>Partially successful:</b> Feedback and guidance was provided, but the state is currently not considering this bill.
Activity #5: Outreach and Trainings with Vermont Educators	<b>Successful:</b> More schools and participants were reached through VT-FUTRES in this reporting period than any other.
Activity #6: Work with DCF to Create CQI-Type Reports on Educational Stability	<b>Partially successful:</b> While a sample report has been created, DCF is not currently able to incorporate it into practice due to database upgrades and other priorities.
Activity #7: Work with Agency of Education to Disseminate and Use Academic Indicators	<b>Not successful:</b> Despite our efforts, these data were not made available during this reporting period. We did achieve commitment by a Education Subcommittee to continue to seek this data in the future.
Activity #8: Develop and pilot fidelity measure for Rock the GRADES	<b>Partially successful:</b> Fidelity measure was developed but not piloted due to changing Rock the GRADES toolkit.
Activity #9: Complete follow-up training and system measures	<b>Successful:</b> Follow up evaluation and systems data collected with reasonable response rate.
Activity #10: Share findings from youth engagement activities with local districts around the state.	<b>Successful:</b> We successfully recruited 3 youth who were able to participate in seven of our 25 Educational Stability presentations over the last 6 months.





3. **Interpretation:** Overall, we believe our efforts led to significant and sustainable system changes in Vermont. There were a few activities we wish could have gone further, and Dr. Suter will make himself available to state partners who wish to continue this work in the future as described above.

## Conclusions

*Describe and interpret the overall impact of the project on children and families. Include discussion of any relevant process evaluation data that may help to interpret outcomes.*

Overall, the results of our evaluation indicate the VT-FUTRES project provided a strong foundation for improving school stability and well-being for Vermont youth in custody. Our four project goals improved district and statewide capacity building through (a) design of the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit, (b) trainings and outreach to improve practice, (c) data collection and use, and (d) youth engagement.

Over the project period, modest increases in educational stability were observed statewide, with significant increases in some districts and no change in others. Statewide, we saw a positive school stability increase from 65.0% of students in custody (school year 2011-2012) to 68.4% (2013-2014). Individual districts showed double-digit (3) and significant increases (2), while others showed no change or small decreases in school stability. When examining students in custody who changed living placements during the year, school stability dropped and did not show any increase over time (28.5%, 2011-2012 and 28.8% 2013-2014). Taken together, this first-of-its-kind examination of Vermont school stability: (a) showed how many youth change schools in the middle of their school years, (b) revealed how different school stability is from district to district (ranging from 43% to 89% of students in custody changing schools), and (c) created a baseline for examining longer term changes with future data collection.

Youth survey and interview findings from the Youth Engagement Survey (YES) highlighted the importance of school stability on school outcomes and positive impact of teacher and peer relationships and engagement with school. Overall, students who were attending or planning to attend college (aka *educational resiliency*) experienced greater living situation and school stability in high school. Exploring what led to stability, youth shared (through quantitative and qualitative feedback) that student engagement in school was critical, emphasizing the importance of teacher-student relationships, supportive peers, and having high expectations for their future success. These findings reveal underlying mechanisms for why stability is important: It helps maintain these adult and peer relationships positively correlated with student success.

Responses from district judges, showed they agreed that focusing on educational stability during court hearings had a positive impact youth and family engagement. During this project, approximately half of the presiding judges that oversee placement decisions, reported routinely using bench cards and other information developed with this project (in collaboration with the Vermont Court Improvement Program).

Our efforts to engage youth provided an important opportunity for them to share their voice and experiences to engage and influence policy makers and the field. The youth's ideas and



initiatives (YES data collection, presentation at state conference, testimony to state legislature, writing of research articles) were more powerful than our original plans (e.g., using social media and creating youth leadership teams). These youth created lasting resources that whose effects will continue long after this project.

As shared above, we were not able to collect data on all proposed short-term outcomes, and that also has an impact on youth. The resources we developed (i.e., *Rock the GRADES*, film *No Decision About Me Without Me*, trainings, policy recommendations) are well aligned with the outcomes data we collected (e.g., improving individual relationships and systems collaboration) but could not be directly tested because of lack of data. That is a clear limitation of this evaluation, and we have worked hard to shine a light on what remains unknown as well as sharing what we learned. By doing so, our goal is that the recommendations made that were not implemented (AOE providing data on student outcomes, DCF regularly reporting data on school stability, legislature passing a bill on school stability) will be available when our systems are able to catch up (e.g., when AOE has more staffing, DCF updates their data system, the legislature meets again next year).

***Describe and interpret the overall impact of the project on the individual agencies and organizations involved. Include discussion of any relevant process evaluation data that may help to interpret outcomes.***

The primary agencies and organizations targeted by this project include the Department for Children and Families (DCF district offices and central office), the Agency of Education (AOE), the courts and Vermont Justice for Children's Taskforce, and the Youth Development Program (YDP). VT-FUTRES created resources that have impacted multiple groups and targeted individual ones. Shared resources that have become part of interdisciplinary practice include the Memorandum of Understanding between DCF and AOE, the Best Interest Determination Form, and the VT-FUTRES website.

DCF was our primary partner throughout this project and likely received the biggest impact from this work. While many of the tools and resources we developed were for interdisciplinary audiences, the primary toolkit, *Rock the GRADES*, was developed for DCF district offices to use to improve the school stability of their youth. The dozens of strategies and tools were not only designed for their use, but DCF personnel received the majority of trainings and technical assistance to use them successfully. And not just during the grant, but these trainings have also been embedded in existing trainings for social workers and caregivers through the Child Welfare Training Partnership. This has fundamentally changed foundations training for these personnel. In addition, while we were not successful in updating the DCF data system to include more accurate data collection and regular reporting, our recommendations did create the template that will be used when the system is updated.

Objectively we made much less of an impact on practices at the Agency of Education. The primary goal of supporting their sharing more educational outcome data on youth in custody was not met. With that said, they did share the first two data points, and agreed to the Memorandum of Understanding which provides much greater clarity for districts and schools that school



stability should be the first consideration and not the exception. And by the end of the project, the new liaison from AOE assigned to this work was beginning to engage with the resources we created, so they will be oriented to this work with the materials and tools we created.

The Vermont Justice for Children's Taskforce was an interdisciplinary group that focused on educational stability for youth in custody prior to this project. However, it was the VT-FUTRES project that helped reconvene this group and meet more regularly. To promote sustainability of this work, we worked to engage these state leaders with the data that was available, and could be available, through continued efforts on their part.

The Youth Development Program (YDP) identified the youth leaders who created the YES and shared its findings. With support from our project they were able to have a significant impact sharing the experiences of students in custody. In addition to the sustainability of the information they have already shared, we believe their experience opened new avenues for their leadership in the future.

The findings from our community and training surveys support out the impact we believe were made with the groups above. Survey findings showed increases in awareness about the importance of school stability, knowledge and skills for using the practices and tools we developed, and demonstration that they are actively using many of these practices and tools. There is significant work remaining to make school stability the expectation for all students in DCF custody (e.g., all judges routinely raising school stability and education in placement hearings; more students remaining in their home schools even when living placements change; AOE and DCF jointly collecting, sharing, and using data to identify needs and make decisions about system improvements). VT-FUTRES demonstrated that all of these can be accomplished and built capacity in these agencies and programs to carry on this work.

***Describe any impact in the community. Include discussion of any relevant process evaluation data that may help to interpret outcomes.***

The trainings to schools and caregivers are the most direct examples of community outreach for VT-FUTRES. Our project attended the Vermont Foster and Adoptive Parents conference and gave presentations on school stability two years in a row. During the first two years of this project, we struggled with engagement with schools, so during the no-cost extension we specifically targeted outreach to schools in 9 districts around the state. Both of these efforts were well received, with positive ratings indicating increased awareness, skills, and knowledge for school stability.

The focus of VT-FUTRES was on capacity building to improve the agencies, programs, and systems that support students in custody described in the previous section. As such, most effects on the community from this project are distal, indirect, and were not directly measured by this evaluation. With that said, project activities are expected to have positive effects on Vermont communities, and several indirect effects are described here.



First, raising awareness that school stability is important (and preferred) reveals an important area of need typically not discussed in schools and communities. Students attend the school where they live is considered logical, the law, and beneficial for students. We heard this sentiment from many during school presentations and trainings. They either had not considered the benefits of students remaining in their “home” schools, or believed that it was not allowed. With this change in awareness, the belief is that will lead to a change in expectations in schools, and more will advocate for school stability.

Second, the foundational work implementing the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit in districts should have a wider impact than just promoting school stability.

- Generating stronger relationships and networks between child welfare, schools, and courts is beneficial for all students with needs requiring interdisciplinary solutions. Children with mental health challenges, who have experienced trauma, homeless youth, youth who are addicted to drugs and alcohol, and many more benefit from better communication and collaboration across service sectors.
- Recruiting and retaining foster families to increase options for school stability of course creates more opportunities for all children and youth in custody.
- Accessing transportation for school stability, requires collaboration and problem-solving between families, schools, and social workers that can further strengthen relationships for other needs.
- Data analysis on one topic (i.e., school stability) raises interest and questions about other types of outcomes that need to be examined (e.g., trauma, well-being). We experienced this at nearly every data presentation.
- Educating local communities on school stability provides a mechanism for DCF to provide information and resources to their communities more broadly.
- Screening youth for educational stability using the Best Interest Determination form, facilitates an important collaborative discussion that can inform case planning across more topics than simply school placement.

Third, our findings revealed the importance of student engagement, teacher-student relationships, supportive peers, and having high expectations for future success. Similar to the previous point, these are not just effective strategies for students in custody, but for all students. Showing school personnel and community partners that it is possible and critical to improve student engagement for students in custody, underscores a mechanism for reaching many kinds of students disaffected with the school system.

***Describe overall any relevant conclusions about best practices and key aspects of working within a collaborative and the success of cross-agency partnerships and collaborations.***

To paraphrase the youth who completed our Youth Engagement Survey and Interview: It is all about relationships, engagement, and stability. These areas that were important mechanisms for school stability and school success, were also found to be key aspects for the success of collaboration.



From the beginning of VT-FUTRES, relationships with our state and district partners were recognized as critical, and many of our successes and barriers can be tied to the strength of the relationships we had. This started with engaging Joan Rock and securing half of her time to provide expertise, leadership, and connections for this work. Not only was she well respected in the DCF district offices and central office, she was specifically known for her advocacy on the Breakthrough Series Collaborative work that first promoted school stability. Since that project she continued to promote this work in her district, and offer support and guidance to other districts. Recognizing how important her connections were, we named the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit for her. Without her involvement and network of partners, we would not have had nearly the reach and impact we experienced. Similarly, youth engagement outcomes (e.g., YES survey and interviews, presentations, testimony, short film, research manuscripts) became a signature success for this project, that would have been impossible without our relationship to the Youth Development Program. We have heard from youth participants that they often choose not to join advisory groups for new projects because they see projects come and go, and often they are not sure how their input was used or lead to change. By engaging an existing group, and making the relationship about what they wanted to do (rather than what information we needed from them) we believe that resulted in a much more effective set of outcomes.

And where our relationships were not strong, we experienced significant barriers. Notably, our liaison with the Agency of Education (AOE) was not able to participate in many meetings and staffing capacity and competing priorities at AOE meant we did not have access to decision makers and needed data. A new education liaison was identified by the end of our project and our hope is they can engage with the Vermont Justice for Children's Taskforce that will lead this work going forward. Similarly, with our stronger connections in DCF offices, it took much more work to connect with individual schools. We were successful in reaching many, but not in all districts.

A related best practice underscored in this project is the importance of engagement. Our YES analysis revealed this for students in school, and it is also critical for rallying and motivating partners. The youth engagement efforts were an excellent example of this. Rather than simply holding meetings and making recommendations for systems change (the work of many youth leadership or advisory groups), our youth partners decided from the outset that they wanted to engage policy makers through multiple means. The choice to conduct a research study was made because they believed district providers, state administrators, and legislators needed to hear youth stories in both qualitative and quantitative ways to best motivate them. Developing research manuscripts was part of that, but they also chose to present the findings at a statewide conference and in testimony at the statehouse. And to reach an even wider audience, they helped create the short film *No Decision About Me Without Me*. Separately, we noted that the training evaluation feedback we received was higher for our full day conference than for our shorter more discrete trainings. The VT-FUTRES conference provided an outlet to show the film, hear from youth, and had an extremely inspirational key note speaker, Charlie Appelstein. In short, these full-day events were more engaging.

School stability is of course the focus of this project and grant award and provides a metaphor for the importance of achieving stability of change. Recognizing that two years is a short time period, VT-FUTRES promoted sustainability for the beginning. While we provided many



trainings and technical assistance to district and state audiences, this was coupled with concrete resources (e.g., *Rock the GRADES*, *Best Interest Determination Form* film) that would be available after memory of the training had faded. Even the training curriculum and materials were provided to districts, so they could be offered after the resources of this project had ended. Similarly, we focused on integrating our materials and recommendations into existing trainings, procedures, data systems, a website, and even a legislative bill so this work could be sustained post grant award. And the areas where we did not achieve the change we planned (i.e., increasing AOE and DCF capacity to collect, report, and use data) we provided concrete recommendations and resources (e.g., data indicators, report templates) that will be available when there is capacity to implement them.

## Implications of Results & Recommendations

### *Present recommendations to administrators of future, similar projects.*

Our primary recommendations are to heed the lessons shared by the youth outlined in the previous sections: relationships, engagement, and stability. The importance of relationships cannot be overstated, especially for projects with similarly short timelines. Who are the decision makers? Who is already working in this area? Who are their strongest allies? Where are the areas of disagreement, and how will you navigate them? Seeking answers to these questions cannot wait until you are writing the proposal or after it is awarded. It is not enough to have an evidence-based intervention if no one will adopt it. Engagement is where you move from connections to action. We found success doing this through sharing resources that were immediately useful and made providers lives easier (not more burdensome), and by reaching hearts through youth sharing powerful stories of their experiences in school. Working toward sustainability should be self-evident for grant funded projects like this, but too often our team has experienced impactful work that simply fades away because there was no exploration of how it would continue beyond the award.

It has been shared several times in this report, but we strongly believe that projects like this should include the people that are the target population for the work. For this project, it was older youth, and we had tremendous support from a team of engaged youth leaders connected to the Youth Development Program. And they were not included simply as advisors but provided opportunity and support to create their own work. The power of youth sharing their personal stories for raising awareness and motivating leadership to improve practices was evident in their work. There is a need for more participatory research that engages youth as consultants and experts. The YES allowed youth in foster care in the small rural state of Vermont to speak out about their educational experience in a forum that led to increased awareness and policy and practice change.

### *Present recommendations to project funders.*

We thank you for this opportunity to promote collaboration between child welfare, education and other partners. The needs of children and youth in custody cannot be met by child welfare alone, and by targeting a specific issue, connected to the Fostering Connections and Increasing





Adoptions Act of 2008 (PL 110–351) and the Uninterrupted Scholars Act (USA), shone a spotlight on an area that deserved greater attention and work. This is just one example of the targeted interdisciplinary work that is needed between child welfare and other providing agencies and partners, so we believe these interdisciplinary opportunities should continue.

In addition to offering new funding opportunities, sharing resources and making connections between grantees (and non-grantees) is an important role for the Children’s Bureau. The opportunities to connect at conferences and during grantee calls were powerful and very helpful. Creating more opportunities like this, and more direct sharing of state / regional exemplars could provide even greater capacity building. For example, as our project struggled to create an iPhone app and help state agencies provide more accurate data collection and reporting, a concrete example or demonstration of an existing data system would have been very helpful.

***Present recommendations to the general field.***

The findings of this VT-FUTRES support specific implementation strategies such as interagency collaboration and teaming to increase likelihood of school stability for children in foster care. Specifically, the *Rock the GRADES* toolkit provided an array of evidence-informed strategies and resources for social workers and their interdisciplinary partners.

State child welfare and educational systems should continue to work with local education systems to develop clear guidelines that support educational stability and smooth transitions for youth in care, while also providing opportunities for youth to learn from each other about possibilities post high school. For instance, policies that can (a) support specific trauma informed practices for children and youth in foster care, most of whom have experienced trauma, (b) provide transportation to and from school, (c) facilitate additional peer and adult mentors upon arrival at new schools, and (d) emphasize the importance of keeping kid’s local should a home placement change occur. These types of practice may help mitigate the trauma experienced when they leave their families.

The findings also point to the importance of harnessing strong relationships between positive adults and youth in care. Further, structured transitions in school and access to information about post-secondary opportunities could help set the stage for more positive educational and overall well-being outcomes. Interventions that include structured transitions, peer supports and positive teacher/coach mentors such as *Better Futures* may be successful at increasing the higher education participation of young people in foster care (Phillips et al., 2013). Better Futures is an on-campus Summer Institute at Portland State University that includes coaching provided to youth by older peers who are in college and have shared experiences around foster care and/or mental health. The program brings together youth, coaches and guest speakers for information sharing and mutual support.

Additional implications for social work practice include the importance of engaging youth. The power and influence made possible through engagement of youth in a participatory research process was clearly demonstrated through this project. Similar to Checkoway and Richards-Schuster’s (2004) work, our project also found that engaging youth in survey research allowed them to give voice to their own experiences and use their own stories to change social work



policy and practice. Often, the critical missing piece in the development of policies and practice guidance related to youth is the actual lived experience of the youth for whom the policies will affect. If clients are considered the experts on their stories, then they need to be a part of the conversation and decision making process. The insight of the youth in foster care is invaluable.



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## Appendices

- A. VT-FUTRES Logic Model
- B. Rock the GRADES Toolkit Outline
- C. Vermont Education Best Interest Determination Form
- D. Vermont Bench Card
- E. VT-FUTRES Community Readiness Survey
- F. VT-FUTRES School Stability Data Summary
- G. Department for Children and Families New School Data Entry Form
- H. *Nothing About Me, Without Me* Film Discussion Guide



## VT-FUTRES Logic Model

Needs	Inputs	Activities	Service Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
<p><b>Youth in Foster Care</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More youth in foster care, esp. older youth</li> <li>• High placement mobility</li> <li>• Indications for high education instability</li> </ul>	<p><b>DCF</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RC expertise and committed time</li> <li>• Recent transformation</li> <li>• New guidance on educational outcomes</li> <li>• Workers have iPhones</li> </ul> <p><b>AOE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EDW database work</li> <li>• Emphasis on social, emotional well-being</li> </ul> <p><b>Court</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational stability bench card</li> </ul> <p><b>Interagency</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MOU on ed stability</li> <li>• Resources and findings from BSC pilot</li> </ul>	<p><b>Rock the GRADES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State &amp; national input</li> <li>• Synthesize toolkit</li> <li>• Develop curriculum</li> <li>• Phase 1 pilot in few regions, revise, then Phase 2 statewide</li> <li>• Final revision of <i>Rock the GRADES</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Build Local Capacity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disseminate toolkit through trainings, web, &amp; iPhone app</li> <li>• <i>Endless Dreams</i> trainings &amp; train-the-trainer</li> <li>• Judicial bench cards</li> </ul> <p><b>Cross-System Data</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop educational stability data collection</li> <li>• Collaborate with education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State and local coordination between DCF, courts, and education</li> <li>• <i>Rock the GRADES</i> toolkit and training curriculum</li> <li>• All (12) RCs receive training in <i>Rock the GRADES</i></li> <li>• All MS/HS youth in foster care receive support strategies from <i>Rock the GRADES</i></li> <li>• 12-15 Vermont trainers certified to deliver <i>Endless Dreams</i> curriculum</li> <li>• <i>Endless Dreams</i> trainings (2)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Youth</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase educational stability</li> <li>• Reduce number of school days missed during transition</li> <li>• Reduce school records transfer time</li> <li>• Increase attendance</li> <li>• Increased # of CSPs for target population</li> <li>• Increased education stability focus in CSPs</li> <li>• Improve youth &amp; parent engagement in plans</li> </ul> <p><b>System Functioning</b></p>	<p><b>Youth</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce suspension/expulsion</li> <li>• Increase those eligible for grade promotion</li> <li>• Increase high school graduation</li> <li>• Increase post-secondary application and enrollment</li> <li>• Improved social and emotional well-being</li> <li>• Fewer placement changes &amp; improved permanency</li> </ul> <p><b>System Functioning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing trainings and supervision for providers</li> <li>• Regular review of educational stability &amp; outcome data to monitor progress and guide improvements</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No systematic workforce capacity</li> <li>• No systematic data collection, analysis, &amp; review</li> <li>• Need input from youth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Justice for Children Task Force</li> <li>• Statewide CSP process &amp; infrastructure</li> <li>• Strong youth leadership <b><i>VT-FUTRES / UVM</i></b></li> <li>• <i>Endless Dreams</i> curriculum with local training capacity</li> <li>• Local and national expertise advisory teams</li> <li>• Strong relationships with state partners / stakeholders</li> <li>• Extensive experience in project and grants management</li> <li>• Expertise in evaluating state systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support sustainable data systems</li> <li>• Disseminate findings</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Youth Engagement</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with youth to take leadership roles</li> <li>• Create regional youth leadership teams</li> <li>• Engage youth in sharing experiences</li> </ul>	<p>delivered (50 trained)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RCs collect &amp; share educational stability data on all youth in foster care</li> <li>• Interactive website used by multi-disciplinary partners</li> <li>• iPhone app used by RCs</li> <li>• Social media and/or videos created and shared by youth leaders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased awareness of importance of educational stability</li> <li>• Increased skills, knowledge, and capacities of multi-disciplinary providers</li> <li>• Use of training components by participants</li> <li>• Improved perception of cross-disciplinary collaborations to improve educational success of foster youth</li> <li>• State policy recommendations and changes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integration of educational stability data in DCF/DOE databases</li> </ul> <p><b><i>CB/Field Improved Knowledge</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation &amp; sustainability educational stability strategies</li> <li>• Factors and strategies associated with successful partnerships</li> </ul>
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## Rock the GRADES Toolkit – Outline

Full Toolkit Available online at: <http://vtfutres.org/>

Rock the GRADES is not a single document, but rather a toolkit of resources organized by the GRADES acronym:

- G** Generate networks in child welfare, educational, court systems and partnering agencies.
- R** Recruit & retain foster families in school districts with high rates of foster care placements.
- A** Access transportation to increase educational stability.
- D** Data collection and use across disciplines to identify needs and track progress.
- E** Educate local communities on importance of educational stability for youth in foster care.
- S** Screen youth in foster care for educational stability and well-being.

### **G: Generate multi-disciplinary collaboratives among child welfare, educational, court systems and partnering agencies.**

Working together to focus on local practices and inform state policies, families, youth, DCF, the courts, the schools, and partnering agencies can improve stability and outcomes for young people in care. The Rock the GRADES curriculum provides resources to assist regional partners to:

- Develop a list of primary contacts in local schools for DCF staff to use.
- Forge relationships with the Local Interagency Teams or other regional networks and educating them on the issues related to Educational Stability.
- Collaborating across sectors to share resources, brainstorm solutions and craft the procedures that help keep local kids local.
- Provide feedback that can inform policy makers at the state level.

### ***Creating and Updating School Directories***

Instructions on the development of DCF District School Directories to enhance communication.

#### **G 1 Creating and Updating School Directories**

Social Workers can use the School Directory to expedite student records and touch base with members of a child's school team. This document explains how to create and update a school directory and includes a sample.

### ***Templates***

#### **G 2 School Personnel Contact Directory – Excel**

An Excel template for creating a school personnel contact directory.

#### **G 4 Principal Letter Directory TEMPLATE**

A sample letter to principals to request that school staff review your directory to ensure that all information is up to date.



***Developing a Local Recruitment Team***

Walks RCs through the process of collaborating with community partners to enhance local resource family recruitment efforts, the engagement of new families, and family retention.

**G 5a Recruitment and Retention Teams**

DCF staff regularly work with other family support agencies and child placement organizations in the community including mental health centers, social service non---profits, residential entities, schools, etc. By building strong working relationships and sharing local resources, all of these social service providers are more effective at supporting children and families.

**G 5b How a Child's Interdisciplinary Team Helps Educational Stability**

A multidisciplinary team promotes educational stability by bringing district partners together to brainstorm, problem---solve and advocate for a child's needs.

**G 5c Building a Work Team that Functions**

Regardless of the purpose of any work team, there is a process to forming teams that function effectively. This document provides an overview and process for forming effective work teams.

***Forms and Templates*****G 6 Recruitment Team Form Letter**

A form letter to help in organizing an inter-organizational meeting with area staff dedicated to recruiting, training, and retaining resource families.

**R: Recruit & retain foster families in school districts with high rates of foster care placements.**

Students are more likely to remain in their home school if there are foster homes available in their home community. Local placements lessen the need for complicated transportation plans and written agreements between school/child welfare districts. Furthermore, youth who remain local can more easily participate in familiar extra-curricular activities and maintain contact with friends and family members. Everyone can have a role in recruiting foster families in their community. This can mean assisting in development of a recruitment plan in local schools, churches or non-profit organizations, supporting the DCF Resource Coordinator in their efforts to engage new resource homes or thanking an existing foster family for their efforts.

***Step 1: Plan and Recruit Local Resource Families***

Develop a targeted recruitment plan and successfully recruit new resource families in school districts with largest proportion of youth in the child welfare system.

**R Step 1-1 Recruitment and Educational Stability – the Why, Who, and How**

An overview of the connection between strong resource family recruitment and educational stability, as well as ways develop an effective recruitment structure.

**R Step 1-2 Resource Family Recruitment is Everyone's Job**

From the District Director to the person who answers the telephone, family finding and recruitment is everybody at DCF's job. Here are several ways in which recruitment can be part of everybody's job.

#### R Step 1-3 Working With Your Partners In Service

PINS Partners are an invaluable resource to each district. These are teams of civic-minded volunteers from local groups with a goal to support area children.

#### R Step 1-4 Steps For Building a Recruitment Plan

Step-by-step guide to building an annual recruitment plan.

#### R Step 1-5 Why Is Recruitment So Important

A solid recruitment plan advances educational well-being for children and youth in foster care because it leads a greater variety of resource parents in a given town.

Templates

#### R Step 1-6 Recruitment Plan Calendar

Sample Recruitment Calendar to help Resource Coordinators develop an annual plan.

#### R Step 1-7 Sample Child Descriptions

Sample child descriptions or family recruitment.

#### R Step 1-8 Foster-Kin Family Referral Letter – Happy Holidays

A sample letter to requesting referrals of Resource Families for DCF staff to later contact about becoming Resource Families.

#### R Step 1-9 General Press Release Template

A sample press release highlighting the need for foster parents.

#### R Step 1-10 Rural Recruitment PPT

Vermont Recruitment presentation from Project Family Rural Recruitment and Retention

### ***Step 2: Engage Prospective Resource Families to Move Them from Inquiry to Care-giving***

#### R Step 2-1 Prospective Family Engagement Process

Moving a family from their initial inquiry to placing a child in their home – keeping track of the details and providing good customer service.

#### R Step 2-2 Family Finding

Strategies for locating and supporting kin or fictive kin to become resource parents.

Forms

#### R Step 2-3 Becoming a Resource Family Checklist

A checklist for prospective resource families of the tasks that need to be completed as part of the application process.



R Step 2-4 Genogram and Connections of Affection for Family Finding

A genogram and connections tool to assist in finding kin and fictive kin.

R Step 2-5 Foster/Kin Family Pre-Screen Form

A form for collecting basic information about prospective resource families.

R Step 2-6 Six Steps to Find a Family

A Practice Guide to Family Search and Engagement – developed by the National Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Placement

***Step 3: Make Residential Placements with Educational Well-being in Mind.***

R Step 3-1 Quality Placements Support Permanency and Educational Stability

Discusses the connection between placing a child in the appropriate resource home and their achieving permanency and educational stability. Provides strategies.

R Step 3-2 Referral for Out of Home Placement

R Step 3-3 Emergency Placement Cheat sheet

R Step 3-4 Placement and School Form

R Step 3-5 Placement Checklist and Medical Authorization

***Step 4: Retain Current Resource Families by Providing Support and Recognition***

Support and train existing foster families to maintain placements and educational stability.

R Step 4-1 Resource Family Retention Overview

R Step 4-2 Planning a Retention Event

R Step 4-3 May Is National Foster Care Month

R Step 4-4 Resource Parent Spotlight

Resource Parent Spotlight is a way to support individual resource families for their efforts with working with our system and the children. This type of event has a dual purpose and that is to inform the staff about the family and what their strengths are.

Templates

R Step 4-5 Letter to Editor Foster Care Month

R Step 4-6 Foster care month PINS letter

R Step 4-7 Foster Care Month School PR Letter #1

R Step 4-8 Foster Care Month School Letter and Press Release

***Step 5 : Reflect on Recruitment and Retention Success and Areas for Improvement***

Capture input on the successes and/or challenges of placements and review that information to develop the strongest possible recruitment, placement and retention strategies.

R Step 5-1 Review Recruitment, Placement and Retention Results and Reflect for the Future  
Forms

R Step 5-2 Exit Survey for Social Workers



R Step 5-3 Exit Survey for the Child  
 R Step 5-4 Exit Survey for the Family

## **A: Access transportation to increase educational stability.**

If a youth has been placed in a resource home outside of their home school district, and it has been determined in their best interest to remain in their home school, it is necessary to develop a workable transportation plan. While coordinating transportation is a DCF responsibility, the process works best when there is collaboration between DCF, the education districts involved, families, and other partners. Creative problem solving and a realistic look at logistics also have a role to play in the process.

### ***The Role of Transportation in Educational Stability***

How to include and implement transportation considerations into educational best interest for Vermont students in foster care.

#### **A 1 Transportation to Maintain Educational Stability: Points to Consider and Developing a Transportation Plan**

Discussion of key factors to keep in mind when developing a transportation plan that respects the best interests of the child.

#### **A 2 When School Stability Requires Transportation: State Considerations Issue Brief A Foster Care and Education issue brief on Educational Stability and Transportation developed by the American Bar Association.**

#### **A 3 Process for Transportation Reimbursement**

Directions for getting new transporters approved, as well as, the process for getting individuals reimbursed for transporting students to maintain educational stability.

#### **A 4 Foster-Kin Parent Expense Reimbursement Form**

State of Vermont form used to reimburse individuals for transporting children to maintain educational stability.

## **D: Data collection and use across disciplines to identify needs and track progress.**

Education-related data for youth in foster care allows those responsible to monitor how successfully students are maintained in their home school, how well those students are doing academically, and where we need to make improvements on either a system or individual level. The VT-FUTRES Project is working with the Department of Children and Families and the Agency of Education to capture existing educational stability data. It is also piloting a new Vermont Education Stability Database to examine how students in its custody are faring in school.

### ***Vermont Educational Stability Data***



Measuring school stability is a key activity for VT-FUTRES. Two reports present Department for Children & Families Family Services placement and educational stability data for the 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-2014 school years.

#### D 1 Vermont School Stability

Graphs showing number of living placements and number of school changes for Vermont students in foster care for the school years of 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14.

#### D 2 VT Educational Stability Summary

A visual which examines the correlation between placement changes and educational stability for Vermont students in foster care.

#### ***District Educational Stability Data***

D 3 District level graphs showing number of living placements and number of school changes for Vermont students in foster care for the school years of 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14.

#### ***Youth Engagement Survey***

A student designed survey collecting the educational experiences and opinions of transitioning and former youth in custody.

#### D 4 Youth Education Survey Summary

A summary of the Youth Education Survey completed by 100 young Vermonters on their educational experiences while in foster care.

### **E: Educate local communities on importance of educational stability for youth in foster care.**

Expanding local partners' understanding of the educational and placement needs of children in state care is a key feature of the Rock the GRADES model. There are compelling studies and personal stories which illustrate the benefits to a youth of remaining in their home school. There are also state and federal laws which address a student's right to a stable education. Conferences, Family Court "Bench Bars", school meetings, church bulletins and social media are all effective ways to inform community partners of how they can advocate for and support students in foster care both in and out of the classroom.

#### ***Overview***

##### E 1 Educate Local Community Overview

Strategies for "getting the word out" to local communities on how and why to promote educational stability for students in foster care.

##### E 2 Using "No Decision About Me, Without Me" Video in Schools

Resources for presenting the "No Decision About Me, Without Me" video to school staff. Three parts:

- Sample email invitation





- Preparing for Presentation
- Sample Presentation Script and FAQ's

***Resources:***

E 2b Elevator Speeches

Short blurbs to inform community members about the importance of educational stability for children in foster care.

E 3 What Education Leaders Can Do

Actions that Education Leaders can take to promote educational stability policy and practice.

E 4 Sample Speech to School Staff

A speech for school staff describing the need for educational stability and keeping kids local.

E 4a School Presentation Request Letter

Template for DCF staff to use when requesting to give a presentation to school faculty.

E 5 Community Partner Powerpoint

E 6 Educational Stability Powerpoint for LIT

E 7 Educational Stability Powerpoint for Bench Bars

E 8 Educational Stability Powerpoint for Mental Health

A powerpoint for school clinicians and other mental health workers providing information about educational stability for students in foster care.

E 9 Powerpoint Family Centered Practice

A powerpoint for school staff and community partners explaining DCF family centered practice.

E 10 Powerpoint Trauma Informed Schools – long

A powerpoint for school staff which discusses child trauma, its impact on learning and behavior, and the benefit of educational stability. One hour version.

E 11 Powerpoint Trauma Informed Schools – short

A powerpoint presentation for school staff which discusses child trauma, its impact on learning and behavior, and the benefit of educational stability. Thirty minute version.

***Meeting the Educational Needs of Students in the Child Welfare System – For Teachers***

A 14 page booklet for educators with recommendations of how to support students in foster care.

***MOU Guidance for Educational Stability***

The MOU between DCF and AOE allows children to remain in their home school district regardless of their town of residence.

***Endless Dreams Curriculum Manual***



## **S: Screen youth in foster care for educational stability and well-being.**

By asking relevant questions of youth and the adults in their life, we can assess the student's educational strengths and needs and ensure they are being met. This allows for informed placement decisions and the setting of long term goals. Vermont's Education Best Interest Determination Form, known as the "BID", guides this process by focusing attention on a range of academic, extracurricular and family factors that need to be examined when developing school placement plans.

### ***Overview***

#### **S 1 Screening for Educational Success Overview**

An overview of the strategies and tools to ensure that a child's educational well-being remains a strong priority.

### ***Forms, Templates and Resources***

#### **S 2 Vermont MOU Between DCF and AOE to Maintain Educational Placement**

Vermont's memorandum of understanding to maintain educational placement for a child when they come into or move within foster care.

#### **S 3 MOU Guidance for Educational Stability**

The MOU between DCF and AOE allows children to remain in their home school district regardless of their town of residence.

#### **S 4 Education Best Interest Determination Evaluation Form**

An Education Best Interest Determination needs to be completed for every child or youth when they come into care, change living placement, or at least once a year. Please download this form, fill online and save. It can also be printed prior to filling out or after complete.

#### **S 5a BID Meeting Invite Letter**

A letter to invite participation in a child's Educational Best Interest Determination conversation.

#### **S 5b Educational Meeting Checklist**

A checklist for facilitating a meeting to discuss the educational best interest of a student in foster care.

#### **S 6 Best Interest Determination Meeting Agenda**

A sample agenda for a team meeting to discuss the educational best interest of a student in foster care.

#### **S 7 Report Card Request Ltr Template**

Requests that schools send copy of students' report cards to their DCF worker.

#### **S 8 Superintendent Maintain School Request Ltr Template**



Requests that the child be able to remain in their familiar school when it has been determined in their best interest to do so. To be accompanied by a completed Best Interest Determination form.

**S 9 Report Cards for Special Education Students in DCF Custody Memo**

A memo from the Agency of Education informing schools that Educational Surrogates are to receive copies report cards for their student(s).

**S 10 Educational Surrogate Memo**

Memo from Agency of Education on the appointment of Educational Surrogates.

**S 11 Best Practice for School Transitions**

A draft document outlining the steps that need to be taken when it is in the best interest of a child to transition to a new school and role of the different systems involved – school, family, DCF and judicial.



## Vermont Education Best Interest Determination Form

Available online at: <http://vtfutres.org/>

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

DCF Family / Child #: \_\_\_\_\_ Child's Education ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

### Instructions:

This process is based on the assumption that a student should remain in their current school\* *unless* the considerations on the following pages indicate that *a change of school placement is in the child's best interest*.

- This form is to be filled out at the child's date of placement and each time there is a change in living arrangement.
- Individuals with insight into the child's educational best interest are encouraged to participate in a BID meeting or conversation.
- You may use relevant information from recent meetings (i.e., EST, CSP, IEP or 504).

\***Current school** is defined as the school the child is attending *prior* to a change in living arrangement.

Current School and Supervisory Union/School District: \_\_\_\_\_

Previous School(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Current Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Best Interest Determination Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

### Please list who was consulted and/or who attended a meeting about BID.

Name	Title / Role	Contact Information
	Child	
	Child's Primary Parents	
	Child's extended family as appropriate	
	Kin/Foster Family	
	DCF	
	Educator	
	Educator	
	GAL	
	Service providers	
	Educational surrogate	
	Other	



## Documentation and Records

Which of these were used for BID? *Check all that apply and include in chart:*

- ☐ Report cards
- ☐ Progress reports
- ☐ Achievement data (test scores)
- ☐ Attendance data
- ☐ IEP
- ☐ 504 Plan
- ☐ Coordinated Services Plan (or Act 264 Plan)
- ☐ Emails or correspondence from individuals consulted
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Considerations	Yes	No
<b>1. The child believes that remaining in their current school is in their best interest.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider social interactions, bullying, privacy issues, academics, extracurricular activities.</li> </ul> <i>Key factors in decision:</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>2. The parents/prior custodians believe that remaining in the current school is in the child's best interest.</b> <i>Key factors in decision:</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>3. The distance to their current school will be appropriate for a daily commute.</b> <i>Key factors in decision:</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>4. The child has attended the current school for a long time or is attached to the school.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider includes the child's ties to his or her current school, including significant relationships and involvement in extracurricular activities.</li> </ul> <i>Key factors in decision:</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>5. Safety considerations favor remaining in the current school.</b> <i>Key factors in decision:</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Considerations	Yes	No
<p><b>6. Remaining in the same school will positively impact the child's social, emotional, and/or behavioral well-being.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The effects of trauma on learning including attention, concentration, mood, interpersonal trust, and communication. A child who has experienced trauma can benefit immensely from remaining in their same classroom and school, even when they move to a new home or a new part of town.</li> <li>Where do the child's siblings attend school?</li> </ul> <p><i>Key factors in decision:</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>7. Remaining in the same school will positively impact the child's academics.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider how the child is performing academically in the current school and the child's academic/career goals. Also, students on average lose 6 months of academic progress for each school change.</li> </ul> <p><i>Key factors in decision:</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>8. The child's permanency goal, plan and expected date for achieving the permanency (reunification, guardianship, or adoption) support remaining in their current school placement.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DCF is required to place a child with a relative when appropriate. This factor may override a child remaining in their current school.</li> <li>The initial permanency goal for most children is to be reunited with their primary parents.</li> </ul> <p><i>Key factors in decision:</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Best Interest Determination Summary

Please summarize the key factors influencing the decision of the team below:





### Education Best Interest Determination Recommendation of the Team

- ☐ *The student shall remain in the same school where the child is currently enrolled.*

School: \_\_\_\_\_ SU / SD: \_\_\_\_\_

Transportation will be provided by: \_\_\_\_\_

Transportation will be paid for by what agency? \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ *Based on the best interest determination, a change in school placement is needed (see below)*

School: \_\_\_\_\_ SU / SD: \_\_\_\_\_

Individual responsible for enrolling child in school: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **If a change in educational placement is needed:**

1. The child's school transfer date should be determined by the child's best interest. Does it coincide with a logical juncture in the child's academic or personal progress (e.g., after an event that is significant to the child or end of the school year)?
2. Enrollment in the new school should take place without interruption of the child's education, with all education records provided to the new school. *(See interagency guidelines).*

- ☐ *The team disagrees on the best interest determination for the child. If so, next steps are:*
- DCF Social Worker sends supervisor and District Director all materials shared with local school authorities including the case plan and reasons for denial. DCF District Director shall forward this information to DCF Child Protection and Field Operations Director.
  - The school district shall contact the AOE State Interagency Coordinator, send the same documentation and reasons for denial.



## Vermont Bench Card

### QUESTIONS TO ENSURE THAT THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE ARE BEING ADDRESSED

#### Enrollment

- Is the child or youth enrolled in school?
  - At which school is the child or youth enrolled?
  - In what type of school setting (e.g, a specialized school)?
- How long has the child or youth been attending his/her current school?
  - Where is this school located in relation to the child's foster care placement?
  - Were efforts made to continue school placement, where feasible?

#### Transportation

- How is the child/youth getting to and from school?

#### Attendance

- Is the child/youth regularly attending school?
- How many days of school has the child/youth missed this year?
  - What is the reason for these absences?
- Are there any disciplinary actions that interfere with school attendance?

#### Performance Level

- When did the child/youth last receive an educational evaluation or assessment?
- Is the child/youth receiving any tutoring or other academic supportive services?
- Is the youth on track academically for his/her current grade level? Is the child/youth reading at grade level?

#### Tracking Education Information

- Does this child/youth have a responsible adult serving as an education advocate?
  - If Yes: Who is this adult? \_\_\_\_\_ over



## ADDRESSING THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

### **Change in Placement / Change in School**

- Has this child/youth experienced a change in schools as a result of a change in his or her foster care placement?
  - If yes: How many times has this occurred?
  - If yes: How many days of school did the child miss?

### **Special Education and Related Services Under IDEA & Section 504**

- If the child/youth has a physical, mental health or emotional disability that impacts learning, has this child or youth (birth to age 21) been evaluated for Special Education /Section 504 eligibility and services?

### **Extracurricula r Activities and Talents**

- What are some identifiable areas in which the child or youth is excelling in school?
- Is this child or youth involved in any extracurricular activities?

ADAPTED FROM NCJFCJ's Permanency Planning for Children Department's Checklist



## Community Readiness Survey for Educational Stability

### What is your contact information?

We would like to follow up with you in the Fall of 2013 to see if educational stability has changed in your community and will need your contact information to do that.

We will never connect your name to your survey responses in any publications or reports, and this cover page will be removed from the rest of the survey once we receive it.

<b>Name:</b>
<b>Organization:</b>
<b>Email:</b>
<b>Phone Number:</b>

In what community do you support youth in foster care (e.g., town, county, DCF district, supervisory union)? \_\_\_\_\_

May we send you periodic email updates about our project? ☐ Yes ☐ No

What is your role for supporting youth in foster care in this community?

Please mark all that apply:

<b><i>Child Welfare</i></b> <input type="checkbox"/> DCF District Director <input type="checkbox"/> DCF Resource Coordinator <input type="checkbox"/> DCF Social Worker <input type="checkbox"/> Other DCF Professional: _____	<b><i>Family &amp; Youth</i></b> <input type="checkbox"/> Parent of a child in custody <input type="checkbox"/> Resource parent <input type="checkbox"/> Youth Development Committee member <input type="checkbox"/> Youth in (or formerly in) custody <input type="checkbox"/> Other youth/family role: _____
<b><i>Education</i></b> <input type="checkbox"/> Superintendent <input type="checkbox"/> Principal <input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Director <input type="checkbox"/> Special Educator <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher <input type="checkbox"/> Nurse <input type="checkbox"/> Other education role: _____	<b><i>Judicial &amp; Community</i></b> <input type="checkbox"/> Community member <input type="checkbox"/> Community Parent (no DCF involvement) <input type="checkbox"/> Guardian ad Litem <input type="checkbox"/> Attorney <input type="checkbox"/> Judge <input type="checkbox"/> Other community or legal role: _____

### A. WHAT IS ALREADY BEING DONE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

1. Using a scale from 1-10, *how concerned* would you say people in your community are about ensuring educational stability for youth in foster care?

<i>Not at all</i>										<i>Very concerned</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	



*Please explain your rating:*

2. Please share any efforts (groups, projects, initiatives, task forces, etc.) in your community that are already working on improving educational stability?

3. To help us reach out to them, please provide any contact information you have for the projects you listed above:

<i>Effort Name</i>	<i>Contact Name</i>	<i>Phone / Email</i>

## B. WHAT DOES THE GENERAL PUBLIC KNOW?

4. Using a scale from 1 to 10, *how aware* are people in your community *of the efforts* you described above?

<i>No awareness</i>					<i>Very aware</i>				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

*Please explain your rating:*

5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>



**C. WHO ARE THE KEY LEADERS?**

6. In your community, who are the leaders, champions, and / or advocates for educational stability for youth in foster care? Please provide available names of leaders, their projects and contact information.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Project / Role</i>	<i>Phone / Email</i>

7. Using a scale from 1 to 10, *how concerned* are the leaders in your community about ensuring educational stability for youth in foster care?

<i>Not at all</i>					<i>Very concerned</i>				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Please explain your rating:									

**D. HOW MUCH DO PEOPLE KNOW?**

8. Using a scale from 1 to 10, *how knowledgeable* are people in your community about the importance of educational stability?

<i>Not at all</i>					<i>Very knowledgeable</i>				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Please explain your rating:									

9. What local data are available on educational stability in your community?

--

10. How do people obtain information about educational stability in your community?

--



**E. HOW WILLING ARE PEOPLE TO DO SOMETHING NEW?**

11. Using a scale from 1 to 10, *how willing* are people in your community to improve educational stability for youth in foster care?

<i>Not at all</i>					<i>Very willing</i>				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Please explain your rating:									

**F. WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?**

12. Using a scale from 1 to 10, to what extent does your community *have the resources needed* to ensure educational stability for youth in foster care?

<i>No resources</i>					<i>All resources needed</i>				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Please explain your rating:									

13. In your community, to whom would an individual wanting to ensure educational stability for a youth in foster care turn to first for help? Why?

--

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!!





## VT-FUTRES School Stability Data Summary

# School Stability Summary

Vermont, August 29, 2014



**VT-FUTRES**  
Fostering Understanding To  
Reach Educational Success

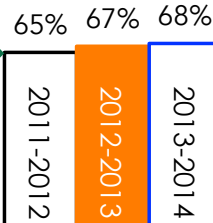
VT-FUTRES is a two-year project to improve educational outcomes for Vermont youth in custody. These youth often experience placement changes but are entitled to remain in the same school if it is in their best interest. *School stability* is an important predictor of school success.

The Department for Children & Families Family Services Division provided placement and school data for three school years: 2011-2012, 2012-2013, & 2013-2014. Because many of the schools in the dataset were missing or inaccurate, VT-FUTRES staff manually reviewed the case files and revised the data.

School age youth in custody		
2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
922	909	843

**Approximately 2/3 of school-age youth in custody stayed in 1 school for entire school year.**

Modest increase over 3 school years



School Stability

Wide range among districts

89%

HIGHEST

LOWEST

43%

**Just under 1/2 of youth changed towns during the school year\***

45%

AND

**When youth changed towns, fewer had school stability.**

29% 27% 29%



School stability & changed towns

Wide range among districts

56%

HIGHEST

LOWEST

6%

*\*Youth changed towns for many reasons including to be placed with kin.*

Questions? Contact Jesse Suter 802-656-1130 or [jesse.suter@uvm.edu](mailto:jesse.suter@uvm.edu)  
<http://www.vtfutres.org>

## Department for Children and Families New School Data Entry Form

### PLACEMENT/SCHOOL

Family # District Caseworker: Child # 

Placement Start Date

Effective Change Date

Liv. Arr.

Pay Type

SFC Pts.

Wraparound

ID #

Contract Amount

Entry/Move/Exit

Reasons

Name: ID: 

Child Placing Agency

Street: Name: City: 

### SCHOOL

*Has anything about child's school information changed (e.g., changed grade, changed school, started alternative school, left school)?*

☐ Yes☐ No

*If "Yes", please complete necessary school information on next page.*

### PLACEMENT REASON

#### ENTRY – All the apply

A Abandonment  
B Caretaker Inability to Cope  
C Child Alcohol Abuse  
D Child Behavior  
E Child Disability  
F Child Drug Abuse  
G Inadequate Housing  
H Incarceration of Parent  
I Neglect  
J Parent Alcohol Abuse  
K Parent Drug Abuse  
L Parent Death  
M Physical Abuse  
N Relinquishment for Adoption  
O Risk of Harm  
P Sexual Abuse  
Q Caretaker Illness

#### LIVING ARRANGEMENT

PA Parent  
RE Relative  
IL Independent Living  
SI Supervised Independent  
CL College  
AD Non-Final Adoption  
FH Foster Home  
GH Group Home  
IR Intensive Residential  
IN Institution  
RA Runaway

#### EXIT – Only Primary Reason

1 Adoption Finalized  
2 Child Died  
3 Custody Discharged to Other Parent  
4 Custody Discharged to Parent  
5 Custody Discharged to Relative  
6 Guardianship to Non-Relative  
7 Guardianship to Relative  
8 Legal Emancipation with no Return Home  
9 On Runaway at time of Discharge  
10 Transfer to Other Agency

#### PAY TYPE

A Adopt Subsidy  
C Contract  
E Emergency  
F Free  
R Regular (Standard/Points)

#### MOVE – Only Primary Reason

20 Planned Step-Down  
21 Planned Step-Up  
22 Other Planned Placement  
23 Trial Reunification  
24 Respite Care  
25 Temp Placement/Visit (home or other)  
26 End Temp Placement/Stay/Respite  
27 Provider Request  
28 Provider Moved  
29 Provider Issues  
30 Program Overpopulation  
31 Permanency Planning Needs  
32 Primary Parent Needs  
33 Aggressive/Threatening Behavior  
34 Fire Setting  
35 Medical Need (Acute)  
36 Medical/Developmental Issues  
37 Mental Health Emergency  
38 Ran Away  
39 Return from Run  
40 Risk to Foster Family Member  
41 School Issues  
42 Sexual/Sexualized Behavior  
43 Stealing  
44 Substance Use/Abuse  
45 Other

FS 580

**SCHOOL**

*This form should be completed every time a child:  
(a) enters custody, (b) changes placements **OR** (c) something changes about school.*

**Date of School Change:**

*If the child is in a school or school program, enter the name of the actual school the child is attending and school code (including alternative schools and residential programs that are providing schooling).*

**School Name and School Code:**

*If child is not attending school, check the most appropriate reason or school status:*

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not attending school (SS005)                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Job Corps (SS011)             | <input type="checkbox"/> Graduated HS (SS016)      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Out-of-state (SS006)                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Incarcerated (SS012)          | <input type="checkbox"/> Finished GED (SS017)      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too young for school (SS008)                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Residential program (SS013)   | <input type="checkbox"/> Dropped out (SS018)       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home schooling (SS004)                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Suspended or Expelled (SS014) | <input type="checkbox"/> In post secondary (SS019) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Private tutoring (SS009)                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Runaway (SS015)               | <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown (SS007)           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No instruction while waiting for placement (SS010) | <input type="checkbox"/> GED program (SS002)           |  |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Adult basic education (SS001) |  |

*If child is attending a school out of the school district where they are living, what is their LEA?*

**LEA Name and LEA Code:**

**Grade (circle one):**

EE	PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	PS	UG
----	----	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	----	----	----	----

**Date Entered Grade:**

*EE = Early Essential Education, PK = Pre Kindergarten, PS = Postsecondary, UG = No grade*

*Is child currently receiving...?*

*Are current versions in case record...?*

Special Ed.	504 Plan	CSP / Act 264	EBID	Report Card
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

*CSP = Coordinated Services Plan, EBID = Education Best Interest Determination current form in case record.*

**Transportation:** *Who is providing transportation to school (check all that apply)?*

- |                                       |   |  |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A. School    | <input type="checkbox"/> C. Kin/Foster parent | <input type="checkbox"/> E. Other          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> B. DCF staff | <input type="checkbox"/> D. Biological parent | <input type="checkbox"/> F. Not applicable |

**School Change Reason:** *Why did child change schools or school status (check all that apply)?*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A. Did not change school (STOP HERE)  | <input type="checkbox"/> G. Safety                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> B. Promoted to next grade or school (e.g., 5 <sup>th</sup> to 6 <sup>th</sup> grade, elementary to middle school) | <input type="checkbox"/> H. Social, emotional, or behavioral supports |
| <input type="checkbox"/> C. Child believes in best interest  | <input type="checkbox"/> I. Academics                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> D. Parents, guardians believe best interest   | <input type="checkbox"/> J. Permanency goal                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> E. Distance / Transportation  | <input type="checkbox"/> K. Enrolled in alternative school            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> F. No attachment to school  | <input type="checkbox"/> L. Unknown                                   |

**Timing Change:** *If changed schools, was it during natural school break (summer, vacation)?* ☐ Yes ☐ No

**Missed Days:** *If changed schools, how many days of school did child miss?*  days



## *Nothing About Me, Without Me Discussion Guide*

Film and Discussion Guide Available online at: <http://vtfutres.org/>

Film Direct Link:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=2&v=v2iSnvUrjQ8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=v2iSnvUrjQ8)

Discussion Guide Direct Link:

<http://vtfutres.org/discussionguide-no-decision-about-me-without-me-vtfutres/>



# **NO DECISION ABOUT ME, WITHOUT ME:**

SCHOOL STORIES OF YOUTH IN CUSTODY

A DOCUMENTARY FILM



AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

## **DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**SEPTEMBER 2014**



VT-FUTRES (Fostering Understanding to Reach Educational Success)  
*presents:*

# **NO DECISION ABOUT ME, WITHOUT ME:**

## SCHOOL STORIES OF YOUTH IN CUSTODY

*Produced in partnership with:*

Vermont Department for Children and Families

Center on Disability and Community Inclusion  
College of Education and Social Services  
University of Vermont

Department of Social Work  
College of Education and Social Services  
University of Vermont

*With funding through:*

The Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for  
Children and Families, Children's Bureau, Grant #90CO1078



## Video Participants:

Chris Turner  
Michael Reyes  
Michelle Daniels  
Danyelle LeClair  
Cody Richardson  
Nancy Benoit  
Cindy Donlon  
Joan Rock

*The VT-FUTRES Project would like to thank all of the participants in this video as well as the STEPS Program at the College of St. Joseph in Rutland, VT. STEPS, Students Taking an Effective Path to Success, is a full-time residential program for Vermont youth transitioning out of foster care.*

### **NATIONAL RESEARCH SUPPORTS school stability:**

- Every time a student changes schools they lose approximately 4-6 months of educational progress.
- High school students in care who changed schools even once were *less than half* as likely to graduate high school.
- The educational outcomes of foster youth trail behind national averages in standardized test scores, a disparity which researchers attribute to frequent school changes.

### **PROMISING NEWS to encourage stability efforts:**

- When youth in foster care stay in the same middle and high school setting their likelihood of graduating high school doubles when compared to youth whose educational placements change.
- Through education and child-welfare collaborations, the Barre, VT DCF district was able to improve educational stability for students in foster care from 37% to 85% in a 5 year period.

## **CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

- The right to be protected against neglect, cruelty, abuse, and exploitation.
- The right to safe housing, healthcare and an education that prepares them for the future.
- The right to be a unique person whose individuality is protected from violation.
- The right to prepare for the responsibilities of parenthood, family life and citizenship.
- The right to maintain relationships with people who are important to you.
- The right to a stable family.
- The right to safe nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime.

*Source: Adapted from publications of the Child Welfare League of America*



# WHAT TO EXPECT FROM “**NO DECISION ABOUT ME, WITHOUT ME**”

**ABSTRACT:** In “*No Decision About Me, Without Me*”, five Vermont youth describe the impact of foster and kinship care and school transitions on their educational experience and well-being. This 18-minute video highlights the challenges inherent in the multiple transitions faced by youth in foster and kinship care. Students discuss how events in their lives affect their social, emotional, behavioral and academic responses to chronic transition, trauma and loss of relationships. The youth provide concrete suggestions for what adults can do to support them through their educational, and life, journey. Additionally, interviews with adult educators, caregivers and child welfare professionals provide further insight into the importance of educational stability and planned school transitions. We hope that this film will inspire you to become more aware of the importance of supporting educational well-being of children and youth in foster and kinship care.

**Audience:** We believe that school teachers, administrators, DCF staff and community partners will benefit from viewing this film and using this discussion guide. Our hope is that participants will have a deeper understanding of the needs that children and youth in foster and kinship care have and how to support them into adulthood. However, the issues in “*No Decision About Me, Without Me*” affect many students in our schools, not just those who are not in foster or kinship care. Families move from town to town, parents are unable to meet child needs or crises at home lead to upheaval and change. These children and youth need support too. When discussing this video, be aware of the challenges that a range of children and youth face and how this information is applicable to your daily work and life.

**Background of VT-FUTRES:** VT-FUTRES (Fostering Understanding to Reach Educational Success) is a 2 year grant funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services to improve educational stability and academic outcome for youth in Vermont’s foster care system. VT-FUTRES is a collaboration between the University of Vermont’s (UVM) Center on Disability and Community Inclusion, UVM’s Department of Social Work, the Vermont State Agency of Education, Vermont State Department for Children and Families (DCF), the Justice for Children’s Task Force of the Vermont Supreme Court, and children and families involved with the public child welfare system. Through this grant we have developed tools primarily for child welfare and educational professionals to use to support educational success for youth in foster and kinship care. This video captures the primary reasons why it is imperative to listen to the voices of all youth about ways to best support their educational, and overall well-being. We hope you find a way to become involved with the youth in your area who could use a helping hand from a caring adult.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### *Understanding transitions, loss, and sense of belonging for youth in foster and kinship care*

- What transitions and losses do the young people in our video experience?
- What strategies and resources do they use to cope in school? What behaviors are common when youth experience loss, transition and instability in their lives?
- What does it look like when a child is unavailable to learn?
- Who (what agencies) need to collaborate to support a student through home and school transitions?
- What does support look like for a student in saying good-bye to the school they are leaving and be oriented to the new school?
- What impacted the sense of belonging felt by the youth in the video?
- What feelings do you associate with belonging to a school community? What feelings do you associate with being an outsider?
- How do we help youth understand that they are not defined by their difficult backgrounds?
- How can we transition to asking youth what has happened to them rather than what is wrong with them?

### *Youth Perspectives*

- Why is it so important to listen to what students have to say about their life experiences, expectations and goals?
- How might a student's perspective of changing schools be different from that of the adults?
- What judgments might you make about this young person who is in foster or kinship care?
- How might our preconceived notions impact actions and decisions that are made on their behalf?

- How do life experiences shape a person's identity?
- What is one thing you can commit to doing to be more inclusive of a child or youth's personal perspective and opinions during key decisions that affect their lives.

### *Determining the child's educational best interest*

- How do professionals make decisions for and with youth and their families?
- Who do you think needs to be involved in the process to determine a child's best interest?
- Have you been involved in a process to discuss what is in the child's educational best interest?
- Are you acquainted with the **Educational Best Interest Determination form**? (see attached document)

### *Mentors, Advocates and Relationships:*

- How can we help youth to maintain connection to their community, friends, and family?
- How can your school insure that every student is connected to some adult as their "go to" person?
- What resources exist in your school and community that can help support these efforts?
- What does self-advocacy look like for students?
- What are significant supports that promote student success?
- How do we promote and develop self-advocacy for students?

**KEEP LOCAL KIDS LOCAL!**

## CONCLUSION

### *What you can do to help?*

We hope that watching and discussing “*No Decision About Me, Without Me*” has provided you with insight into the lives of children and families involved in foster and kinship care. More importantly, we hope it inspires you to take action to support the children and families in your school.

It’s simple to get started. You don’t have to do something complicated or expensive. Just a little support at the right time can make a big difference. Here are some easy ways to show your compassion and support. Talk to co-workers, friends and your family or just write down 3 ways in which you might be able to support a child or family in foster or kinship care.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

### *Additional suggestions for how you can make a difference:*

- Mentor a child or youth
- Become a respite provider
- Provide transportation for a child to attend their home school
- Become a foster parent
- Become an adoptive parent
- Be a helper in your child’s school classroom
- Become involved in extracurricular activities at your school to support a youth in activities of their choice.
- SHARE this film with colleagues and community partners in person or forward the YouTube link.

## Education Best Interest Determination Evaluation Form

Available online at: <http://vtfutres.org/>

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

DCF Family / Child #: \_\_\_\_\_ Child's Education ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

### Instructions:

This process is based on the assumption that a student should remain in their current school\* *unless* the considerations on the following pages indicate that *a change of school placement is in the child's best interest*.

- This form is to be filled out at the child's date of placement and each time there is a change in living arrangement.
- Individuals with insight into the child's educational best interest are encouraged to participate in a BID meeting or conversation.
- You may use relevant information from recent meetings (i.e., EST, CSP, IEP or 504).

\***Current school** is defined as the school the child is attending *prior* to a change in living arrangement.

Current School and Supervisory Union/School District: \_\_\_\_\_

Previous School(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Current Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Best Interest Determination Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

### Please list who was consulted and/or who attended a meeting about BID.

Name	Title / Role	Contact Information
	Child	
	Child's Primary Parents	
	Child's extended family as appropriate	
	Kin/Foster Family	
	DCF	
	Educator	
	Educator	
	GAL	
	Service providers	
	Educational surrogate	
	Other	

### Documentation and Records

Which of these were used for BID? Check all that apply and include in chart:

- ☐ Report cards
- ☐ Progress reports
- ☐ Achievement data (test scores)
- ☐ Attendance data
- ☐ IEP
- ☐ 504 Plan
- ☐ Coordinated Services Plan (or Act 264 Plan)
- ☐ Emails or correspondence from individuals consulted
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Considerations	Yes	No
<p><b>1. The child believes that remaining in their current school is in their best interest.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider social interactions, bullying, privacy issues, academics, extracurricular activities.</li> </ul> <p><i>Key factors in decision:</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>2. The parents/prior custodians believe that remaining in the current school is in the child's best interest.</b></p> <p><i>Key factors in decision:</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>3. The distance to their current school will be appropriate for a daily commute.</b></p> <p><i>Key factors in decision:</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>4. The child has attended the current school for a long time or is attached to the school.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider includes the child's ties to his or her current school, including significant relationships and involvement in extracurricular activities.</li> </ul> <p><i>Key factors in decision:</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>5. Safety considerations favor remaining in the current school.</b></p> <p><i>Key factors in decision:</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>6. Remaining in the same school will positively impact the child's social, emotional, and/or behavioral well-being.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The effects of trauma on learning including attention, concentration, mood, interpersonal trust, and communication. A child who has experienced trauma can benefit immensely from remaining in their same classroom and school, even when they move to a new home or a new part of town.</li> <li>Where do the child's siblings attend school?</li> </ul> <p><i>Key factors in decision:</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>7. Remaining in the same school will positively impact the child's academics.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider how the child is performing academically in the current school and the child's academic/career goals. Also, students on average lose 6 months of academic progress for each school change.</li> </ul> <p><i>Key factors in decision:</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>8. The child's permanency goal, plan and expected date for achieving the permanency (reunification, guardianship, or adoption) support remaining in their current school placement.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DCF is required to place a child with a relative when appropriate. This factor may override a child remaining in their current school.</li> <li>The initial permanency goal for most children is to be reunited with their primary parents.</li> </ul> <p><i>Key factors in decision:</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Best Interest Determination Summary

Please summarize the key factors influencing the decision of the team below:

### Education Best Interest Determination Recommendation of the Team

- ☐ *The student shall remain in the same school where the child is currently enrolled.*

School: \_\_\_\_\_ SU / SD: \_\_\_\_\_

Transportation will be provided by: \_\_\_\_\_

Transportation will be paid for by what agency? \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ *Based on the best interest determination, a change in school placement is needed (see below)*

School: \_\_\_\_\_ SU / SD: \_\_\_\_\_

Individual responsible for enrolling child in school: \_\_\_\_\_

### If a change in educational placement is needed:

1. The child's school transfer date should be determined by the child's best interest. Does it coincide with a logical juncture in the child's academic or personal progress (e.g., after an event that is significant to the child or end of the school year)?
2. Enrollment in the new school should take place without interruption of the child's education, with all education records provided to the new school. *(See interagency guidelines).*

- ☐ *The team disagrees on the best interest determination for the child. If so, next steps are:*

- DCF Social Worker sends supervisor and District Director all materials shared with local school authorities including the case plan and reasons for denial. DCF District Director shall forward this information to DCF Child Protection and Field Operations Director.
- The school district shall contact the AOE State Interagency Coordinator, send the same documentation and reasons for denial.



# School Stability Summary

Vermont, August 29, 2014

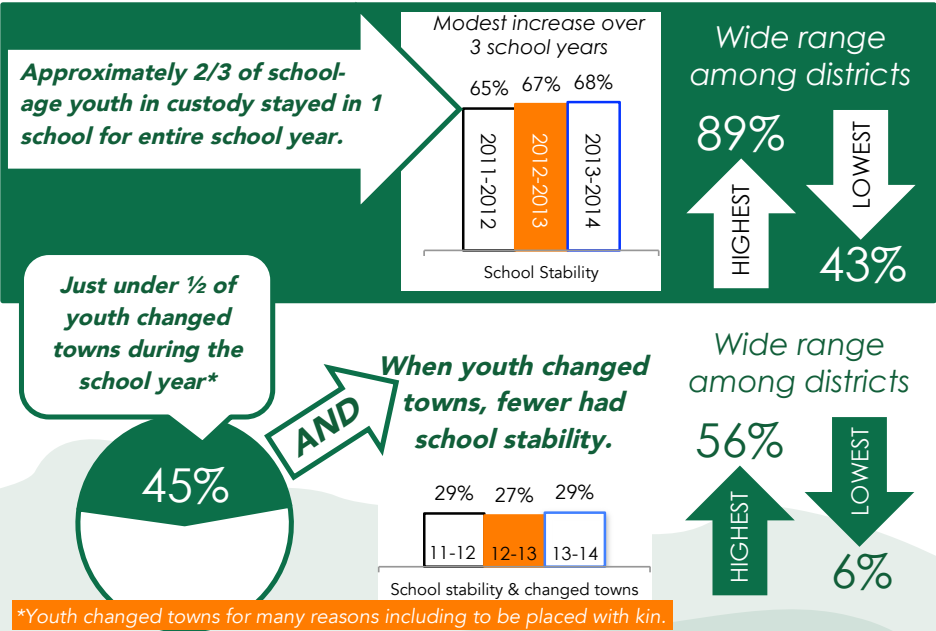


VT-FUTRES  
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2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
922	909	843



Questions? Contact Jesse Suter 802-656-1130 or [jesse.suter@uvm.edu](mailto:jesse.suter@uvm.edu)  
<http://www.vtfutres.org>

## HELPFUL LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Here we share several links to additional sources of information related to improving school stability and success for youth in custody.

Name	Website & Description
VT-FUTRES	<a href="http://www.vtfutres.org">www.vtfutres.org</a>  This is the VT-FUTRES project website created to share the Rock the GRADES toolkit and other resources for service providers, family members, and youth interested in improving educational success for youth in foster care. There is a link to the <a href="#">film</a> as well as links to a range of other materials.
Vermont Justice for Children's Task Force	<a href="http://www.vermontjudiciary.org/JC/masterpages/Committee-justicechildren.aspx">http://www.vermontjudiciary.org/JC/masterpages/Committee-justicechildren.aspx</a>  The Task Force's Education Subcommittee has been promoting educational stability in Vermont for several years.
VT Department for Children and Families	<a href="http://dcf.vermont.gov/">http://dcf.vermont.gov/</a>  It is DCF's mission to ensure the safety, permanence, well-being and law-abidance of Vermont's children and youth. Educational stability and success is an important element of child well-being.
Vermont Agency of Education Interagency Coordination	<a href="http://education.vermont.gov/interagency-coordination">http://education.vermont.gov/interagency-coordination</a>  The Vermont Agency of Education has a workgroup to support coordination of services for students who are also served by other departments and agencies, like DCF. This page includes information and resources for promoting interagency collaboration.
National Network for Foster Care and Education	<a href="http://www.fostercareandeducation.org">http://www.fostercareandeducation.org</a>  This is a national site designed to provide resources for improving education for youth in custody. In particular, check out the "Materials" (or Tools and Resources) page to read excellent brief summaries and more in-depth tools relevant for child welfare, education, and the courts.
Child Welfare Information Gateway	<a href="https://www.childwelfare.gov">https://www.childwelfare.gov</a>  Child Welfare Information Gateway connects child welfare and related professionals to comprehensive information and resources to help protect children and strengthen families. We feature the latest on topics from prevention to permanency, including child abuse and neglect, foster care, and adoption.